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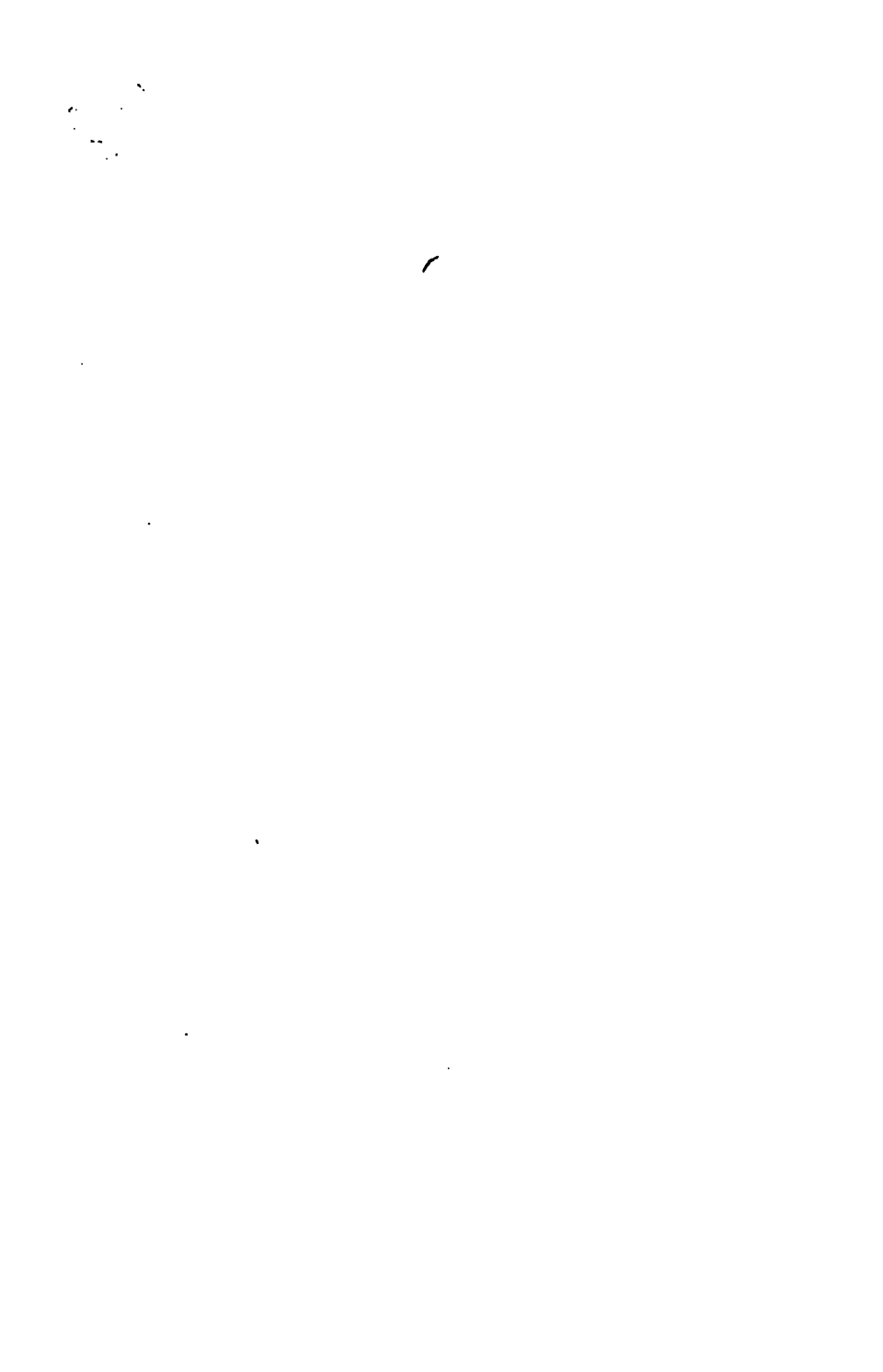
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# THE SPIRIT OF THE TOWN

TOD ROBBINS



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Evening Post.

29 Apr. 1918

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THE SPIRIT OF THE TOWN.

# The Spirit Of The Town

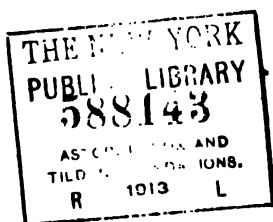
A NOVEL PRESENTATION IN FICTION FORM  
OF THE IMPULSE AND DESIRE WHICH MOULD  
THE LIVES OF MEN.

BY  
TOD ROBBINS

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New York :  
J. S. Ogilvie Publishing Company  
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## INTRODUCTION

A man's life is like the surface of a lake, reflecting alternately the black clouds and the bright sunshine, and stirred constantly by the winds of unrest. So has it been with me, although for a time it seemed as though my sunshine would never break through the murky horizon that shadowed my existence, but now the sky is clear at last, and I will speak.

Strange as this tale may be, my readers, do not consider it the weak wanderings of a disordered brain, nor yet as a fiction formed to please alone, but, looking deeper still, perceive the truth. The truth—what a word is that to conjure with, and yet how difficult it is for a mere man to penetrate the cloak of conventionality and custom, and behold it in all its bright nakedness!

When you have done this, you have looked into the eyes of God.



# The Spirit of the Town

## CHAPTER I

After my father's death I was left alone in the world, but had a comfortable income. From my earliest college days I had decided to devote my future to literature. Professor Noels of the University had often said that I had marked talent, and even the promise of genius, in my work. His estimate of my ability at the time, it must be owned, was in no way inferior to my own, for I had, as is not uncommon in a young man who has a certain amount of promise, a greatly inflated ego. I wrote well, and nothing that could have been said would have convinced me to the contrary. I read what I had written, and knew that it was good, in fact, far above the average. Then it was that I began to dream of the future.

The future of my dreams, as I now look back on it, was a very absurd affair. I saw myself lolling back in the tonneau of a high-powered motor car, the cynosure of all eyes as I whirled through the streets of the great metropolis, while to my pleased ears was wafted the praise of the adoring multitude. Two barriers held me from the immediate fulfillment of my dreams. One of these was that my limited income would not permit the luxuries of a fur overcoat and a motor car, while the other was that I happened to be born and brought up in a very small town where there

was no adoring multitude, and where I was known as just plain Jimmie by every passerby.

The mental blindness of my fellow-citizens galled me to the very soul. Try as I would to make them see the sleeping genius in my inner being, making me different from the common clay about me, they were still unconscious of it, yes, poor plodding human beings, they were little better than the beasts of the fields in my eyes. In all likelihood, they would have gone on calling me Jimmie to the last, had I not taken things in my own hands and left the town.

An old college friend had written me, asking me to visit him for a while. He had an apartment that he shared with another fellow on Ninetieth Street, New York City. I wired him immediately that I would arrive on the next day, and then leisurely packing my belongings, I sauntered down to the station to catch the evening train. I had been careful not to tell any one of my intentions, and so what was my surprise and dismay to find a dozen of my old-time associates gathered about the platform, evidently awaiting me. The postmaster had revealed my plans.

In a moment more they had gathered about me, shaking my hand, patting me on the back, and offering me the thousand and one petty indignities of which their small natures were capable. To think that I should be subjected to such familiarity made me boil inwardly, and so with little ceremony I pushed my way through the crowd, and mounted the rear platform of the train that had pulled into the station. Then, turning about, I took a last look at the sordid spot where I had spent my boyhood.

Back, beyond the low squat station, were the lights of the village. One by one they faded into blackness.

The good inhabitants were going to bed. Down below me, staring up with vacant eyes and loose-lipped mouths, were the village louts who were speeding me on my journey.

"Give my best to Mr. Rockerfellar," cried a voice out of the crowd, "and when you meet him, Jimmie, don't treat him too haughty, or he won't feel at home." There came a burst of idiotic laughter at this, and again the voice broke in, this time in a kind of wail:

"Don't you go and forget us, Jimmie, when you're away."

Again there came a roar of laughter. I slammed the door of the smoker and sank into a seat in no pleasant frame of mind. I could still hear them making the night hideous with their hoarse cries. The porter appeared in the doorway, his black face wreathed in a smile that showed every white ivory in his head. "Dey sure is giving you some send-off, boss," said he. I opened a book of poems, without answering his impertinent remark, and pretended to be engrossed in it, while all the time my ears were straining to hear what was going on outside. Suddenly there came a sharp jerk, a rumbling sound, and then I drew a long breath of relief, for the train was drawing out of the station, and I was at last on my way to the great city that lay under the starlit sky.

## CHAPTER II

The train was carrying very few passengers on this night, and, in consequence, I had the smoking apartment all to myself. Closing my eyes, I let my imagination have full sway.

I had never been in a large city, and so the prospect of seeing life on a grander scale filled me with the keenest delight. As I have said before, I was independently well off, and so had fully made up my mind that I would settle in New York, if I found existence there pleasing to me.

What a career lay before me! Barely twenty-four years of age, burning to the fingertips with creative fire, the literary world seemed mine to conquer at will. I would devote my first year to the writing of the great American novel, that would raise me to the throne of the immortals. I would voice the thoughts of a nation, and play upon the feelings of my readers with the touch of a master. Never a thought of failure penetrated my thick shell of egotism. I believe, at that moment, that I was the most conceited man alive, and, if anticipation of success is the greatest joy that we can experience, the happiest.

Gazing out of the window into the darkness that enshrouded the landscape, I compared the onrushing train with my own life. "Yes," I said to myself. "I will also pierce the night, the night of ignorance and doubt, breaking through all barriers to my goal, and casting never a backward glance, but on, on to suc-

cess." Just at this moment the train came to a lumbering halt.

We had reached the first stop, the town of Morley. Outside, on the platform of the station, quick indistinct figures were moving about, and then came the sound of heavy footsteps, the creaking of the door as it opened, and two old gentlemen entered the smoker, and took seats directly opposite me.

It had been always a hobby of mine to study the human countenance. I prided myself that I had but to look into a man's eyes to read the thoughts behind them. So it was, that I gazed at these strangers intently, wishing to ascertain the true character of my fellow travelers.

Never before had I seen two men of such striking honesty of appearance. Their candid eyes met mine frankly, with friendly interest mirrored in their depths, while every line on their smiling open faces indicated happiness and good will toward their fellow men.

The one sitting nearer the window, it is true, had more of the earthy in his makeup than his less robust companion. His face seemed slightly familiar to me, with its twinkling blue eyes and full cheeks. The man's whole appearance suggested light hearted boyish merriment. He seemed at any moment capable of breaking out into an unrestrained jolly laugh. In a flash of a second it came over me where I had seen his double, or rather a picture of his double. It was in the days of childhood, when I studied this face, and it was everywhere, in the store windows, in books, and even caricatured by men with false whiskers, who stood on street corners, ringing bells. This man, I felt, was a real Santa Claus without the whiskers.



The other, however, attracted me still more. I looked into his large timid eyes, and said to myself, "here is a very good man." He lacked entirely grossness of flesh, his body being so frail, even to the point of emaciation, that his soul, if you can understand me, seemed to shine right through it, as a light might shine through a window-pane that was covered with white frost. He did not need his clerical costume to proclaim him as a man of God.

Having satisfied myself as to the character of my fellow passengers I opened the book of poems and started reading, fearing that my close scrutiny might have proved offensive.

"Well, John," I heard the stouter man say, as we pulled out of the station, "it's a good twenty years now, since we left home for a holiday. What will your flock do without you?"

"I don't know," answered the other in a peculiarly soft and gentle voice. "I didn't want to come, you know that, Will?"

"Do I know it? You bet I know it!" cried the big man in a hearty tone. "Didn't I have the time of my life trying to drag you away, with practically every widow and orphan in the place holding to your coat-tails? Know it?" And he burst into a roar of laughter that shook his whole body, and that brought the tears glistening to his eyes. "And to think, John," he continued in a shaking voice, "that you are going to New York at last after all these years, and that I should be going with you. I declare it makes me feel like a boy again, quite like a boy. And you, John, how about you? Doesn't it sort of make the blood run a little faster to think of all that we are going to see, the tall buildings, the subway, and all the rest of

it, with maybe a couple of plays thrown in for luck? You haven't any objection to a good lively musical comedy with a swing to it, now have you, John?"

"No," answered the clergyman after a moment's pause, and then he sighed deeply.

"Come, come," cried his jovial companion with a shake of his head, "this will never do. I know what's the matter with you. You've got a touch of homesickness already for the good wife and the children. Am I right?"

Now it was the other's turn to shake his head. "No, Will," said he, "it isn't that. I was thinking about Mrs. Watt."

"Fie for shame, John," broke in the Merry Old Gentleman. "And she with her wooden leg, and every day of eighty, and you a clergyman, I blush for you, John, I positively blush for you," and again his contagious merriment filled the air.

I felt my own lips spreading into a smile, in spite of myself. The mere thought of that good and saintly man having an affair with any woman was absurdly ludicrous, but the old and crippled Mrs. Watt, involuntarily I chuckled aloud. The Merry Old Gentleman, as I will continue to call him, heard me, and winked many times solemnly in my direction, while the clergyman, evidently much abashed, was attempting to explain himself in a halting voice.

"You know what I mean, Will," he began. Again the Merry Old Gentleman winked at me. "You see she's pretty sick now." At this the face of the Merry Old Gentleman lost all of its merriment on the instant, and became very grave indeed.

"Isn't that a shame though, isn't that a shame,"

he repeated several times in tones of the deepest contrition.

"Yes, Will, it is," went on the clergyman. "And you know that she made me promise that I would be beside her in her last moments, and read the burial service, when the time came. Now suppose this attack should prove fatal, and that she should pass away, while we were on this trip. Why I would never forgive myself, never," and the eyes of the saintly soul filled with tears.

The Merry Old Gentleman, at this, was silent for many moments, while his brow became furrowed with thought. Finally he spoke.

"John," said he, "we can wire to your wife, who will be looking after her I dare say, and tell her to let us know how the dear old lady gets along. Then if she has a relapse, we'll know about it, and get back by the next train. But never you worry about that," his face began to brighten again visibly, "because when old Mrs. Watt wants a thing, she gets it in spite of rhyme or reason, and if she's set her mind on your giving the funeral oration, why she'll be waiting till you get back, and will probably have it read to her first, so as to make sure she isn't going to be cheated. Don't you worry any, John."

Having thoroughly settled his mind as to Mrs. Watt, the Merry Old Gentleman lapsed into silence, and for a long time the only sounds that reached my ears were the rumbling of the train over the tracks, and the rattling of the window panes in their sockets.

Suddenly the door of the smoker opened, and the conductor came in to get the tickets. I handed him mine without a glance at his face, and so what was my astonishment to hear him answer a civil question of

the good old clergyman's, as, was the train behind time, or the like, in such a savage surly tone, that I saw the reverend white haired man recoil as though he had been struck a blow in the face. Then this brutal railroad official, still with dark anger depicted on his lowering visage, growled out an oath, slammed the door behind him and was gone.

The Merry Old Gentleman was on his feet in an instant, his forehead gone a fiery red, and the veins standing out on it like whipcords.

"My God, sir," he burst forth addressing me, "this is a pretty state of affairs, when a minister of Christianity gets the rough side of such a fellow's tongue with impunity. He needs his head soundly punched, that's what he needs, and I'm the man to do it."

So saying, the infuriated old fellow made for the door, as though in pursuit of the conductor. The clergyman rose, however, and standing before the other, seized him by the arm.

"Come, come, Will," he cried, "listen to reason, fighting will do no good." And then, seeing that the Merry Old Gentleman was for pushing past him, he turned to me. "Please help me to restrain my old friend, sir, before he does himself some mischief. Brawling can accomplish nothing."

I answered his appeal by seizing the Merry Old Gentleman by the other arm, and between the two of us we managed to push him back in his seat, still resisting feebly.

"I'll have him discharged," he panted. "Yes, if I have to see the President himself, he'll lose his position for this night's work. To speak to a minister, a good man, a holy man, in that manner, why he should be thrashed within an inch of his life."

"Come now, Will," said the clergyman, and he smiled a sad smile, "there's no harm done. The man was probably tired and out of patience."

"I'd patience him," cried the Merry Old Gentleman, punching at the empty air with great gusto, "if I only had him here."

Gradually, however, the angry red blood receded from the Merry Old Gentleman's brow, and the fiery light died in his eyes, and then a slow smile spread over his face that creased it into a thousand jolly wrinkles. The storm was over and the sun was shining once again.

"I'm still a blood-thirsty old beggar," he cried with a jubilant boyish laugh. "Remember, John, how I used to fight all your battles for you at school?" And then not waiting for an answer, he turned to me. "You're a strong young man," said he, "a very strong young man," and his eyes looked into mine with an approving look, that made my heart warm at once to the Merry Old Gentleman.

"What characters these would make in a story," I said to myself, and I scarcely knew which to admire the most, the kind forbearance and reserve of the clergyman, or the good-hearted boyish impetuosity of the Merry Old Gentleman.

### CHAPTER III

After the events recorded in the previous chapter, all the barriers of conventionality and custom fell before the fiery impetuosity of the Merry Old Gentleman. He insisted that I should join them in their conversation, and, as the clergyman was not one bit less friendly in his own quiet way, I found myself, in no time, talking as though I had known them for years.

We discussed the topics of the day, religion, politics, etc., and it was not long before I felt that my superior brain powers were being appreciated at last. These two old gentlemen, in spite of their years of experience, listened to me with the most studious attention imaginable, only breaking in now and then with exclamations of awed surprise, to think that I, so young in years, should be so old in wisdom.

After I had expounded to them the theory of evolution, going into the very dust of antiquity to prove my points, my two white haired listeners clapped their hands involuntarily, as though they were sitting in the theatre applauding some dramatic artist. It was the first great tribute that I had as yet received, and I felt the blood mounting to my brow from the joy of it.

There was silence for an instant, when I had finished, the breathless silence of a great moment, and then the Merry Old Gentleman spoke at last.

"John," said he, turning to his amazed companion,

"never did I expect to meet a man of such youthful years, and yet of such magnificent mentality."

The clergyman nodded several times solemnly, evidently so moved by my eloquence, that his very tongue refused to perform its function.

"Wonderful," he finally cried in a strange strangling voice, "wonderful."

"But," continued the Merry Old Gentleman, "it is scarcely a wise thing for men of our advanced age to listen to our young friend here. Already I feel that the faith of my fathers is tottering in my mind. Have you no reasoning left, John, to restore my belief?"

The clergyman could but shake his head at this. In my triumph I was generous enough to feel sorry for the reverend man, but before I could say anything to put him at his ease, the Merry Old Gentleman broke in once more.

"May I ask," said he, "where was the fountain head of your learning, or, in other words, where did you go to college?"

"The University of V———," I responded.

No sooner had my voice died away, than the Merry Old Gentleman bounded from his seat, and grasped me by the hand.

"Well, what do you think of that, John," he cried in a stentorian tone. "Here is a young man, a learned young man from our own college, going out into the world to become a great man, a credit to his Alma mater and his country, and here we are, two wornout old men, able to give him a godspeed on his venture."

So saying, the benevolent old fellow reached down to the bag beside him, and opening it, brought out a quart of whiskey, and placed it on the arm of his chair.

"This state is dry," said he, "so I always take a little along in case I should meet a friend," and he winked at me solemnly.

I was never averse to drinking in moderation, so I took the generous portion that the Merry Old Gentleman poured out for me, and swallowed it, as he shouted, "here's to the dear old college, so drink hearty!"

The clergyman drank to the dear old college in a glass of water.

"You see," said the Merry Old Gentleman, "it's against his principles. We must respect a man's principles, mustn't we?"

"Yes," I answered with a pleasing warmth stealing over me, "we must certainly respect a man's principles."

The conversation at this point naturally turned to the dear old college.

"Is Dr. Graham still dean of the Academic Department?" asked the Merry Old Gentleman. "He is? That's fine. Let's drink his health then," and we did so with brimming glasses.

Soon I found myself telling of my feats while at the university, and listening to the remarks of my hearers, "did you though? Quite remarkable I should say, quite remarkable!" with pleased ears. Then we drank to my future career, and all the while the minister sipped his water, and smiled his sad, slow smile.

A soft white mist pervaded the atmosphere, through which the electric lights shone like stars through a thin cloud veil, while outside the rumbling of the wheels sounded like the music of a monotonous tune, played over and over again. Suddenly I felt that I was alone in a beautiful dream of song, light, and



color, while far out in the white mist, as though from another world came the voice of the Merry Old Gentleman.

"And we tied the rope under the cow's belly," he was saying, "although you were against it, John, and we hoisted her up and put her in the chapel, and there the dean found her in the morning, as big as life," and then he roared with laughter, so that his boisterous merriment broke through the mist that enshrouded me, and jarred my hearing.

For a moment I felt irritated and out of sorts, at hearing this old worn-out tale, that is told by every aged grad, and that speaks of the idiotic sense of humor they must have had in those primitive times, and then again I wanted silence, so that I could listen to the music of the wheels and contemplate the lights through the mist, but all at once a change came over me. I saw the humor of the story for the first time, indeed, I beheld the scene as though it were being enacted before my very sight. The cow, with its great soft, curious eyes, lazily chewing its cud even as it was being hoisted into the chapel, the dean, when he saw the outrage in the morning, and the very expression on his face, all were pictured vividly before me in the white mist.

Suddenly I began to laugh, and having begun, could not stop, so that the Merry Old Gentleman had to slap me on the back, to prevent me from choking to death.

"Here's to the cow," he cried, and he shoved a glass of whiskey through the mist and into my hand.

I raised it with uncertain fingers to my lips, and then felt that I was spilling some and that it was running down my chin and burning it. Some one

wiped it away with a soft pocket handkerchief, and immediately I warmed with a great love for all mankind, and especially for the Merry Old Gentleman.

"What do you say to a game of poker?" cried the Merry Old Gentleman after what seemed years of silence.

The mist was settling down once more, thicker than ever, so that the lights shone like pinpoints, and the faces of the two old gentlemen were completely swallowed up in it. Finally it lifted a trifle, and I saw the pale and beautiful countenance of the clergyman, where he sat directly opposite me.

He was shuffling a pack of cards, and I watched his hands, fascinated at the deft motions of his gliding fingers, and the speed with which he dealt.

"The sky's the limit," I heard the Merry Old Gentleman cry out, and then a voice that was strangely like my own replied, "the bigger the better!"

Through the mist, that was gradually settling down again, I gazed at the five cards that I held. Five face cards, four queens and a jack, seemed to look back at me with live eyes, and the queen of spades winked ever so slightly.

"I drop," said the Merry Old Gentleman, and then looking over my shoulder he whispered, "four ladies, bet the works, old sport, you've caught John napping."

Very slowly and impressively I drew out my wallet, and placing the single bill that it contained on the table, I smiled derisively at the clergyman. He threw a hundred dollar bill on top of mine.

"I'll see you," said he.

"He's got four queens," remarked the Merry Old Gentleman, smiling across the table.

"Now isn't that peculiar," cried the clergyman in

a cold metallic tone, "for I have four kings," and he threw them down before me.

My senses were leaving me. Blackness was settling down fast before my eyes. My head fell down on the table with a thud, and yet I felt no pain, only a certain numbness and dizziness, that made me think that I was revolving round and round, faster and faster and ever in smaller circles.

"Why didn't you raise him, you fool?" came an angry voice out of the blackness.

"Ah, the poor kid's broke now!" said another voice in a pleading tone.

"No matter," growled the first voice, "we could have got his watch and chain, damn you, but now it's too late! Here comes the porter."

The dizziness grew worse and worse, and was followed first by deathly nausea, and then by black unconsciousness. My senses had left me altogether.

## CHAPTER IV

When I awoke again to consciousness it was broad daylight. For a long time I lay with closed eyes, positively lacking the will to open them. My brain was still reeling from the debauch of the night before, and every part of my body felt sick, deathly sick. My throat and mouth were as dry as tinder, while my hands, feet and temples throbbed with fever, as though I had been exposed to a tropical sun for hours.

Through my sick brain were pictured the scenes of the night before, and I inwardly cursed myself for my folly. Even the memory of the Merry Old Gentleman became tinged with bitterness, and when I remembered the few broken phrases that I had heard just before my senses left me, dark doubts of his honesty began to oppress me.

Had these two old men been merely exceptionally clever card sharps, who had preyed upon my youthful innocence and egotism in order to rob me, I asked myself? No, I decided, it was impossible that any one could pull the wool over my eyes to that extent. I must have imagined the card game, while intoxicated, and the money, in all probability, still was safe in my pocketbook.

I opened my eyes, and with a trembling hand, ransacked the clothing that hung above my head. I found the wallet at last, and opening it discovered it was empty.

My first thought at that moment was to call the porter, and tell him of my loss, but gradually this

idea faded. What was the use? I could press no charge against the thieves. I had merely played poker and had lost, that was all. Then I had no desire to expose my innocence for the world to chuckle at. I hated ridicule and pity alike. No, I would keep this affair to myself, all to myself.

I sank back on the pillow with a groan, and lay staring out of the window with unseeing eyes.

It was the worst blow that fate had as yet given me, and it was full in the face. Here was I a young man who prided myself on my mentality and worldly wisdom, taken in by the first fakers that crossed my path. How they must have laughed to themselves, I thought, when they were flattering me and patting me on the back. How they must have enjoyed it all, damn them!

I believe, at that moment, if I could have laid my hands on the plump neck of the Merry Old Gentleman, that I would have squeezed it to a pulp between my fingers. And yet, as I continued to ponder, my wrath for the Merry Old Gentleman waxed into a far greater wrath for the bogus clergyman; I could not forgive the former his last words, nor the tone in which they were spoken. "Ah, the poor kid is broke now," he had said, and the pitying way in which he had said it, as I looked back on it, made me writhe in my berth with rage. Then for the first time I saw myself in the light of truth, as a poor, ignorant country lad with an exalted opinion of himself, going to the city, and for the moment my great egotism fell from me, leaving me naked and very much afraid.

"Boss, it's time to get up now. We're due in an hour."

I turned with a start to find the porter's head stick-

ing through the curtains of the berth, and his black face spread in a smile from ear to ear.

"Lordy, you sure is pale," he continued as he got a look at my white face. "Hadn't I better get yer something? A little liquor now—?" And then I heard his loud guffaw, as he withdrew his head and vanished down the corridor.

At the very mention of whiskey my giddiness and weakness returned in full force. By a great effort of will, I rose unsteadily to my feet and commenced dressing. Every now and then I had to seize the curtains to keep myself from falling, as the train took some unexpected turns. While putting on my trousers, I heard the pleasant jingling of silver, and feeling in my change pocket, I discovered that I still had about three dollars left.

This put a little heart into me, and I finally essayed the trip to the smoking room on my unsteady legs. There were several passengers in their shirt sleeves standing about the wash basins. They exchanged meaning looks among themselves, and made way for me, as I reeled in.

"What a beautiful hangover," I heard one man say, as I plunged my burning face into the cold water.

"Yes," answered another, "he must have been nursing it all night. These southern boys sure do hit the pace."

It is still a mystery to me, how this clever stranger knew that I was from the south, but I have since discovered that travelers are always keen for detective work. Whether it is because they cannot use what brains they have in making money while on the journey, or whether it is impossible for them to get any enjoyment out of themselves, I am unable to say, but

true it is that sleuths abound on any train. When I returned to the buffet car, I felt a little better. I even attempted to eat some breakfast, but when the grinning porter placed a grape fruit smelling strongly of rum before me, I acknowledged myself defeated. It is true I succeeded in drinking a cup of coffee without any inner revulsions, but this was my limit.

As I toyed with a magazine, attempting in vain to grasp the meaning of what I was reading, the conductor approached me. He stood for a long time gazing down at me without a word. "Well," he said at last, "they got off at Trenton. How much did they take from you?"

"Who?" I cried, jarred out of my accustomed calm.

"Why Tubby Johnson and Dopey Kelly of course," said he sharply.

"Tubby Johnson and Dopey Kelly?" I repeated dazedly.

"Sure, the two men that you chummed up with last night. That's what they're called on the train. How much did they get you for?"

"A hundred," I blurted out throwing my pride to the winds. "They took me in completely."

"They could get into Heaven on their face value," said the conductor. "Did they give you the usual line, how they went to your college when they were boys, and all the rest of it?"

"Yes," I answered, "and they must have, too, because they knew the names of the professors, and all about the place."

The railroad official laughed a dry laugh. "Why that's their stock in trade," said he. "They never went to college, but they meet the students coming home, and I bet they know the ins and outs of every

university in this country, and the beauty of it is, that the students pay pretty high for the honor of teaching. They're clever card sharps, that's what they are, and so shrewd in their business that they can't be pulled in by the law. I tried to put you wise to them, by the way I answered Dopey Kelly, but I guess they had you sewed up already," and with a grim nod the conductor passed on.

Now we were entering the suburbs of the city. Rows of brick houses flashed past, and every now and then I got a momentary glimpse of a face at a window, which passed out of my life with the speed of the train, never to come again. Here was a family sitting about the breakfast table, and there a woman bending over her washing, but all were like fragments of a dream that are forever changing.

These new sights would have affected me far more, had it not been for my dazed mental condition. I looked out of the window with dull eyes, seeing little or nothing of the busy life through which I was passing.

At last a great noise, as of a thousand hammers beating on brass, thundered in my ears, and the train came to a halt. I had reached the city at last, the great and glorious city that would recognize my genius, and take me to her bosom.

"All out!" shouted the porter in my very ears, "all out, Boss!"



## CHAPTER V

As is common to most visiting New York for the first time, I had a great curiosity to see that notoriously famous thoroughfare, Broadway. Ever since earliest childhood, it had been pictured before me in books, in popular songs, and even on our provincial stage at home. Always I had wished to see it, and be a part of its gayety, and now at last my chance had come.

I knew that I had plenty of time before me, as it was barely noon when I left the station, and George Wil-mot, my friend, did not expect me until late that after-noon. I intended seeing a little of the city in the meantime, and so I asked a policeman on the corner to direct me to Broadway. He did so, I thought, with a slightly supercilious air, as though I were an irritating child, who had just asked him an absurd and entirely unnecessary question.

It was a day in early autumn, and, as I walked along, the brisk air and exercise made the blood to warm in my veins, and the fog to disappear from my brain. Gazing at the people that thronged the streets, I noticed that one and all hurried along as though each had not a minute to spare from some all important engagement. Quite unconsciously I too quickened my pace, and paid less attention to the sights about me. I was falling into the spirit of the town.

Now the pangs of hunger began to assail me. I had eaten nothing all day, and the fresh air had brought back my healthy appetite. I dropped into a tiny restaurant, and ordered a light lunch. After I

had consumed this I started out on my tour of inspection once again.

Soon I was on Broadway, mingling with its crowds, and marveling at the great buildings, the swarms of people, and the general bustle on all sides. Everything was new and strange to me and therefore everything had a glamour all its own. I gazed into the faces of the passersby, and attempted to classify them all.

"Here was a bank president," I said to myself, "and there right behind him was a wealthy broker, etc., etc."

But soon I had to give up my task as hopeless, for nine-tenths of the crowd that passed me looked to be people of wealth and importance, which on the face of it, I knew to be impossible, and yet little did I guess how many of the men that I saw, who in my home town would have been considered well dressed, nay even stylishly dressed, were looking for work, with little between them and actual want. These were the disciples of the city living up to its one commandment, Bluff.

All hurried along with cold vacant eyes, and some moved their lips, as if they were somnambulists living in a dream, pushing their way onward unconsciously, like puppets moved by a master hand.

There were some who had no reason for their quick pace, and who were going nowhere, but merely walking the streets to kill the tedious hours. If they should be asked "Why do you hurry so?" they could but shake their heads, or answer, "We are but sheep who follow others. Speed is the one essential of the age. We hurry because others hurry."

"But why and where?"

"That we do not want to know."

Near Forty-second street and Broadway I stepped aside and watched the stream of humanity flow past me. Above towered a great building, whose topmost story seemed wedged into the lining of the sky. Many hundred feet from the pavement, a figure of a man, tiny at that height, sat upon a plank suspended from an office-window, busy at some kind of work. The ropes that held him to life, to my unaccustomed eyes, seemed the size of threads. I turned to a roughly clad man beside me.

"He must get pretty good pay for that kind of thing," and I pointed upwards.

The man turned a pair of red blood-shot eyes upon me. "Drop that," said he. "I listens to some of youse Socialists once and now pipe me."

He threw open his coat, and I saw that his vest and shirt were torn and ragged. Then he edged his way into the crowd and was gone, leaving me dumfounded at his words.

Again my gaze became fixed on the black moving figure above me. What a tiny speck it was against the great white face of the building, and yet he and his fellow atoms were responsible for this huge towering monument of industry. All at once I felt a great pride in mankind looking up at this product of human endeavor, this giant of the many sightless eyes.

I never asked myself, if the giant were a malignant giant, who fed on the lives of a thousand, and doomed them to constant servitude, no it was enough for me that it was powerful and secure in its great height.

Some there were in the passing crowd, who, seeing me staring up intently, joined me in my scrutiny, only to go on again with smiles of derision. For them it

was nothing to see a man suspended between heaven and earth, to me it was a remarkable sight.

Suddenly something happened. It happened in a flash of a second, and yet my eyes saw it all with frightful distinctness.

The tiny figure of the workman doubled up on his platform, as though he had been seized with a cramp in the pit of the stomach. For a moment he clung to his perilous perch, then his arms and legs began to thrash about like the tentacles of an insect, and finally he came hurtling down to the pavement, a whirling bundle of clothes. He struck a dozen feet from me, like an over ripe plum, and at the same moment something warm and sticky spurted into my face. Half unconsciously my hand went up to it, and came down again dripping red.

I stared stupidly at the ruin on the sidewalk that still struggled feebly. A man in a large fur overcoat was bending over it. In my mental daze it seemed to me that this man had sprung up from the pavement itself. Again I looked at the writhing figure at his feet.

The head of the dying man slowly turned, as I watched, and rose several inches from the pavement. The eyes opened wide and were fixed with a terrible stare on the face that bent over him, and then, little by little, the bleeding lips drew back from the gleaming teeth in a ghastly grimace. Then the chin tilted violently backwards, the whole body shook with a last convulsive tremor, and death had harvested another life.

The man in the fur coat straightened himself to his full height. He towered head and shoulders above the crowd that surged about him, and the red beams

of the setting sun fell full on his face, and brought to view the blood beneath his dark skin, that flushed his cheeks to crimson, and the sparkling of his great black eyes. He looked so full of fiery life that the dead man at his feet, and even those about him, seemed like waxen images in comparison.

I noticed all this in the fraction of a second, and then slowly the whole scene began to revolve before my eyes. I felt the dizziness of nausea creeping over me once more. The sight that I had seen had been too much for my already overtaxed nerves, and I had to support myself against an hospitable lamp-post, while the solid pavement seemed to be rising up into little waves under my feet.

I believe I would have dropped in another moment, had not a huge and powerful arm circled my waist at that very instant, holding me up by the sheer strength of it.

"Steady," said a deep voice in my ear, "steady, and lean on me."

At that I think my senses must have left me altogether for the next thing I remember was the burning sensation of whiskey trickling down my throat, and the sight of a glittering pyramid of glasses at the back of a bar.

The big man in the fur coat sat beside me at a round wooden table, while he supported me in an upright position with one hand, and held the drink to my lips with the other.

"Come, come, finish it up," said he, "and you'll be yourself in no time."

There was so much of authority, mingled with kindness, in his voice that I did what he told me quite mechanically, and, although I choked over the fiery

stuff, still I put it down, to the very last drop. I felt much better immediately, and started to thank this kind stranger, but he would have none of it.

"Nonsense," he cried, interrupting me; "it was my plain duty to help you, nothing more nor less, and anybody would have done it in my place."

I had an excellent opportunity to study the man as he spoke, and, as you may well suppose, I lost none of it. Never had I seen a face that held true masculine beauty in every perfect feature until that moment, and there was more than mere beauty in it, for there was strength and indomitable will, stamped there for the world to see. His eyes, as I have already said, were black, or rather appeared to be black at a first glance, but when you came to look into them closely you discovered that they were in reality a very deep violet. Little flashes of light gleamed in their depths, now fading, now reappearing again, sparkling like drops of water in the sunshine. His face was smooth shaven, and, as I have already said, flushed with health till it seemed as though the blood were fairly bursting through the skin of his cheeks. Added to this, he was dressed in the very extreme of fashion, a little over-dressed some might have said, but still his clothes set off his tall and graceful figure to the very best advantage.

The one thing that puzzled me was his age. While he was speaking, and the glittering lights playing in his eyes, he looked not a day over twenty-six, but when he was silent, and his face in repose, little tired wrinkles appeared on his broad forehead and about his tightly compressed lips. I concluded that he was still a young man, who perhaps had led a fast life in his extreme youth, but a little later I changed my opinion, and decided that he was still leading an extremely fast life,

for he was ordering one high-ball right after another, and drinking them without the slightest change of manner.

"Well, what do you think of our city?" he was asking with a curious look in his eyes.

"I thought it quite wonderful until that accident happened," I answered; "but that sort of cast a cloud over things for a while. But how did you know that I didn't live here?"

"By your methodical manner, and, plainer still, by your broad southern accent," said he with a smile. "But," he continued gravely, "you mustn't let that affair shake you up. It has got to be, that kind of thing, in any great city. Men have to do the work, and accidents are bound to happen. The city cannot be held responsible for those who lose their lives in beautifying her. They are but the sacrifice to the God of Progress."

He spoke quickly and yet clearly, each word straight to the point, and he regarded me closely the while, as though he sought to perceive the impression that his speech made on me.

"But don't you think," I faltered, "that this man was risking his life unnecessarily on that frail platform? It positively made me dizzy to watch him."

"No, not unnecessarily," he rejoined. "The work had to be done, if not by him, then by another. Besides the man knew what danger there was. He went into it with his eyes open. He was paid for the chance he ran, and he accepted the price. He was not cheated, be sure of that, for we humans put more value on life, especially our own lives, than they are in reality worth, and he in all likelihood has already spent over and over again the value of his."

"But can life be valued on money scales?" I ventured.

"Why not?" he cried; "for this is the age of money. Everything, from the Statue of Liberty down to the picture of John Sullivan over the bar, has a price, and life, the commonest and therefore the cheapest commodity of all, surely has one, that is, some kinds of life," and he stopped abruptly.

"Some kinds of life?" I repeated.

"Yes," he went on; "I mean the weaker life, born to be beaten in the struggle, like that poor fellow who was killed just now. They must do the dangerous and dirty work because they are good for nothing else. They beautify the city for the strong to live in. To the victor belong the spoils, you know."

Suddenly he bent over the table and looked me straight in the eyes. "Do you know," said he, "I can tell that you're not of that kind. You're of the winning class, I can see it in your eyes. You'll stay in the fight, and get your share of the spoils, and then you'll love the city and bring up strong sons to fight her battles for her."

At that this strange man rose to his feet. "I'm off now," he continued. "Here's my card. Look me up," and he had pushed through the swinging doors of the saloon and was gone, leaving a thin piece of pasteboard in my hand.

All the time that he had been speaking I felt a strange exhilaration throughout my whole being, as though some of his excessive strength had entered into me, and even now that he was gone my heart seemed to beat faster than was its wont. After my experience of the night before it would seem that I had had enough of picking up chance acquaintances, but this at-



tractive stranger had unarmed me of all my suspicions in some unaccountable manner. His words had restored all my old egotism, and had fanned the flame of my ambition to even greater heights, so that I sat for a full hour at that table in the bar-room, dreaming empty dreams of success.

Coming out of my trance at last, I looked at the card that I still held in my hand. The name, Mr. Richard Noman, was engraved upon it.

"Mr. Richard Noman," I repeated half aloud, "I will most certainly look you up."

## CHAPTER VI

When I reached Ninetieth Street already the early dusk of autumn had fallen over the city. On all sides the glittering electric signs had sprung to life with the setting sun, and a myriad of toiling men, tired from a long day's work, were seeking their homes. Even now, when they were their own masters, they hurried along as though their lives depended on it, boarding street cars, jumping off again, pushing their way through the over-crowded traffic, at, as it seemed to me, imminent peril of their lives.

"Yes," I said to myself as I watched them, "Mr. Noman is right, and here at least life is a very cheap affair."

At last I reached my friend's apartment, and after pressing the button under his name in the vestibule, waited the results. Soon the clicking of the latch told me that the door was open, and I entered.

It was one of those small buildings of four stories without an elevator. As I mounted the stairs I heard a cheery voice hailing me from above, and, on looking up, saw the round cherubic face of George Wilnot himself peering at me from over the banisters.

"So you're here at last," he cried. "Well I had about given you up. Thought you had been kidnapped in this wild and wicked city. You're just in time for dinner."

By this time I was beside him, and he had grabbed my hand and was shaking it warmly.

"You're white about the gills, man," he continued,

"and all and all you look like the morning after. What have you been doing to yourself, anyway?"

"Wait till after dinner, George," I broke in, "and then I'll tell you of my travels; but in the meanwhile the inner man needs replenishing."

"Right you are, Jim," said he. "Just follow me," and he led the way through the open door and into as pleasant a looking little sitting-room as I ever want to see.

It reminded me forcibly of our old room in the dormitory at college, with its rows of dark colored pipes on the table, its gaily tinted sporting prints, and lastly the steins of many different shapes that adorned the mantelpiece. Adjoining it was the dining-room, and through the partly drawn curtains I could see the gleaming silver on the white table-cloth, and the dark figure of a man moving here and there about it.

"Well, what do you think of the place?" cried George with a slightly pompous air. "It's pretty comfortable, now, isn't it?"

"Yes," I replied, "it certainly is. You must have made a big hit in the city to run a place like this."

"Well, yes—er, that is I should say, not exactly yet," and his face darkened a trifle. "But I'm going to," he continued cheerily. "In fact, it's not far off"—again his pompous air returned—"when I'll be able to get out of this dump and settle on Riverside Drive or maybe Fifth Avenue. Mr. Noman says——"

"Mr. Noman?" I broke in.

"To be sure—Noman, a friend of mine. Why?"

"Oh, nothing," said I. "Probably just a coincidence. I'll tell you about it later."

"Well, Mr. Noman says that there's going to be a great chance in the banking business for a young fel-

low with push and brains about him, and you may be sure that when he says a thing it's bound to be correct."

At this George placed his lips close to my ear with a knowing look. "He's on the inside," he whispered.

"On the inside?"

"Yes, with all the big men; and, what's more, he makes them dance to any tune that he plays. I've got the thing straight, and you can bet on that."

Although I missed the sense of his unintelligible mutterings at the time, I was too tired and travel-worn to seek his meaning further.

"I want to wash up, if you don't mind," I said.

"To be sure," said he. "I quite forgot," and he conducted me to a little white tiled bathroom with a shower in one corner. "Now if you've got everything you want, I'll call Bill."

"And who is Bill?" I asked, bending over the wash-basin.

"Bill Hardy? Oh, he's the fellow who lives here with me. He's a queer chap," he continued a little dubiously, "and I don't know whether you'll take to him or not. In fact, most people don't. He's even been getting on my nerves lately, with his damned old-fashioned ideas. Not at all progressive, you know, and, to tell the truth, he's a regular wet blanket on a man's ambitions. It's funny that I didn't catch on to him when I first met him, but I didn't somehow, and in fact took to him amazingly. I hate to chuck him over now, for he's all right in his way, but you'll see for yourself. Come out when you're ready," and he was gone.

What a change there was in George Wilmot, I thought, as I slowly dried my face with the towel. This talkative, well-dressed young man seemed an en-

tirely different person from the slow, methodical friend of my college days. Even his face was changed for the better, losing its old sleepy look, and taking to itself a certain firmness of the jaw, that spoke of a fixed purpose in life.

"If the city could do all this for my friend," I said to myself, "what then could it not do for me?"

When I entered the sitting-room a tall, slender young man rose from a morris chair and confronted me with outstretched hand.

"I'm Bill Hardy," said he. "George went out for the evening paper, so I'll have to introduce myself."

I took his hand and gazed into his eyes. Never had I seen eyes so blue as his. They were large and limpid, and when you looked into them it was as though you were contemplating a cloudless sky through immeasurable azure distances. They created a kind of calm and peaceful feeling in my breast, like the sensation that follows a good deed, or, to be plain to all, a good dinner.

The rest of the man's features were entirely eclipsed by his eyes, and, though they were in no way malformed, seemed very commonplace by comparison. Indeed, with this exception, he appeared to be a very plain man both in looks and tastes, for his clothes were ill-fitting and baggy, while in several places on his coat I noticed that the buttons were missing. All this I took in later, for at the time I could see nothing but his eyes. They positively fascinated me.

How long I gazed into them with the rapt expression of a love-sick girl, I am unable to say, but it was not until George Wilmot returned that I was myself once more, and was even then so shaken out of my usual manner that I spoke like a little child.

"You must excuse me," I cried greatly embarrassed, "for staring you out of countenance in that manner, but your eyes are the most remarkable eyes that I have ever beheld," and then I stopped and flushed a deep crimson, fearing that he might take offense at my extremely childish speech.

I was wrong, however, for when he spoke it was in the pleased tone of a happy man.

"Thank you, sir," said he, and then he turned to Wilmot, and continued in a slightly sadder tone:

"Do you know, George, you were the last to tell me that, the very last, and that was many months ago. I don't suppose you think that my eyes are quite remarkable now, do you, George?"

"No, I'll be damned if I do!" growled George in a surly tone. "To me they're a beastly color, and positively crooked!"

Hardy turned to me with a sad, slow smile. "You see," said he quite simply.

At his words I felt a kind of dull anger rising in my breast against my old friend.

"Why, you're wrong, George, positively wrong!" I cried. "You must be blind."

"Blind?" shouted George, and I saw the red blood mounting into his temples.

Just at this moment the heavy curtains of the dining-room were drawn aside, and a little dark man in butler's dress stood in the aperture. "Dinner is served," said he, and the beginnings of our childish quarrel were nipped in the bud. Now, as I look back on it the whole affair seemed laughably absurd. Why should I, on first meeting a man, look so long into his eyes and be so moved from the natural course of conventionality as to remark immediately on their beauty?

Then again why should this Bill Hardy be so evidently pleased at my words, and finally why should George Wilmot fly into a temper and contradict me so rudely on such an evident truth? For many days I pondered over these seemingly inexplicable facts, but it was not until after many years had gone their way that I discovered the truth.

Soon we had seated ourselves about the table and were demolishing the food set before us. It was an elaborate dinner of several courses, and you may be sure that I did it ample justice.

Meanwhile George, with a hostile look in the direction of Hardy, launched out into a lengthy account of his doings since he had been in the city. According to him he had had the goddess of fortune as a handmaiden from the moment that he had first started business, but as I looked at Bill Hardy from time to time I saw a strange light in his blue eyes that told me as plainly as though he had spoken that George was telling one lie right on the top of another. Then it was that I began to feel a great contempt for my old friend, and all the showiness of appearance that had at first blinded me seemed to fall away from him, leaving him naked before me, a pitifully weak boaster and liar.

I noticed that he helped himself over-plentifully to the decanter of wine that stood on the table before him, so that gradually his round face grew scarlet and his eyes misty.

"I'm a receiving teller now," he cried jubilantly, "and I'm going up and up until I land the president's job. Dick Noman says they can't stop me."

"You'll be drunk in no time," said Hardy coldly, "if you don't go easy with that stuff."

"And who do you think you are?" muttered George

with an ugly look. "If I want to get tanked, why that's my own business, and none of yours. Besides, to-morrow is a holiday, and I can sleep as late as I want. There wouldn't be any fun in this city if you had your way, Bill Hardy."

"Maybe not," answered the other, and then he lapsed into silence once more.

George pulled out his watch, and held it before his eyes with an unsteady hand. "Nine o'clock," he muttered thickly, "and I'm going to meet Noman at eleven. Yes, I had better go easy for a while."

By this time the butler had retired to the kitchen, leaving us alone over our coffee. I took the opportunity to settle a question that had puzzled me ever since I had been in the place.

"What do you make as receiving teller?" I asked.

"About two thousand a year," he answered readily.

"But you don't mean to tell me that you can keep up this establishment on that?" I cried.

"Oh, no," said he. "I play the market now and then," and again he shot a look of hatred at Hardy. "But how about you, Jim? Are you still bent on a literary career? If you are, I'll take you with me to-night and introduce you to Noman, for he's hand and glove with all kinds of magazine men. Everybody likes him, and I believe he's the best known man in the city."

At that I saw Hardy stir in his seat uneasily, while a troubled look crept up into his eyes, and somehow I felt instinctively that here at least was one man who cared very little for the popular idol.

"I've got an appointment with him at Maxim's," George continued, "and I was telling him about you



yesterday, and he said that he would like to meet you. Do you feel up to a little fast life to-night?"

I told him that I was pretty tired, and then narrated my adventures of the last twenty-four hours, ending up with a description of the kind stranger who had helped me into the saloon.

"By Jove," cried George in excitement, "you say his name was Noman? Well that sounds like my friend sure enough. Have you still got his card about you?"

I pulled it out of my pocket and handed it to him. He gave it but one glance, and then cried out, "Dick Noman it is," and then added in a lower tone, "isn't that a coincidence though?"

"How so?" said I.

"Why, that you should meet him, of course," he answered. "It was one chance in about three million, and yet, strange to say, I met him myself on the very first day that I put foot in the city. He stopped me in the street and asked me for the time. I'll never forget the impression he made on me, little 'yap' that I was. He looked to me as though he had every cent of ready money in the world clinking in his change pocket. We got talking quite casually on many subjects, as we walked along, and the first thing I knew I had confided to him that I was looking for a job. 'Looking for a job,' said he, 'well, you won't have to look far. I can tell a bright chap when I see him, and you're it by every mark. I can get something for you around the corner.' So saying he led me around to the National Trust and introduced me to the president himself. The result of the whole thing is that I am still at the same place, and, what's more, making good money, too."

"I did not meet Mr. Noman the first day that I arrived," said Bill Hardy slowly, "because I was here before him," and there was a kind of pathetic sadness in his deep voice.

## CHAPTER VII

For an hour or two after dinner we sat in the sitting-room talking on many different subjects. I say we, meaning George Wilmot and myself, for Hardy had little or nothing to say at first. Indeed, the man had little enough to say at most times, although on this very evening, as I have yet to tell, he was shaken out of his silence for once, and later spoke freely enough.

He had a strange habit of showing every emotion on his face, so that you had but to glance at him to read his innermost feelings. As Wilmot continued to tell me of his financial success I saw a great withering contempt depicted on Hardy's countenance, and George must have seen it too, for he shot little angry glances at him from time to time.

"We must have money," Wilmot was saying, "for without it we are nothing. This is the age of money, and the world revolves on a golden axis. We have an aristocracy of the wealthy——"

"An aristocracy of thieves!" broke in Hardy coldly.

"It may be," answered George, flushing a trifle, "but they are strong, brave thieves, who hold what they take."

"On the contrary," said Hardy, "they are weak cowardly thieves, who hide beneath the cloak of the law, even while they pick the poor man's pocket with their trembling fingers. Why I have far more respect for the hardened criminal, who breaks into a man's house to rob, for he, at least, takes a chance, while your money kings do not."

"Nonsense!" cried George hotly. "They are the strong, and so naturally they oppress the weak. It is the way of the world. Take, for instance, the old medieval barons. They were robbers, plain and simple, when it comes to that."

"Yes," answered Hardy with flashing eyes, "but at least they exposed themselves in the battle-line. They came out before the world and took what they could with a strong hand. They hung out their shield for the whole universe to see. They did not skulk in the dark places, and strike down the unwary, for they were, at any rate, men."

"But think of all the good they do," said George, after a slight pause. "Hospitals, libraries, and museums whose doors are open to all for the enlightenment of the working masses are erected by these men for the poor. These money kings, as you call them, are, in my mind, the great philanthropists of the age."

At this a grim smile lit up Hardy's somber face. "I see you have learned your lesson, George," said he, "but I have yet a word to say. These money kings, these good philanthropists, we will say, are surrounded by a pack of lean and hungry wolves, for convenience we shall call them the human wolves. Each day they gather a little closer about the good fat philanthropists, and gaze at them hungrily with starving eyes. Now these wolves, as I have said, are only human wolves, and therefore sleep at night. This the good fat philanthropists know only too well, and as they have grown tired, and maybe a little frightened too, at the nearness and ferocity of the wolves, they decide upon a certain plan.

"'I cannot enjoy my meals any more,' says the first philanthropist.

“‘Nor I,’ says the second philanthropist. ‘Yesterday I had a bun snatched right out of my hand by one of them.’

“‘They sleep at night,’ says the first philanthropist.

“‘That’s so, they do,’ answers the second philanthropist.

“Now, to cut a long story short, on that very night these two good and benevolent men stole out into the darkness among the sleeping human wolves and stabbed to death, let us say, a round dozen of them, without the slightest danger to themselves. In the morning, when the human wolves woke up, they never noticed that their number was a trifle smaller than on the night before, but what they did see was the good philanthropists standing in their midst and actually throwing food to them. This so surprised them that, for a moment, they were unable to move, but at last they trotted forward, and, after licking the good men’s hands in token of grateful appreciation, started to consume the good things. It may as well be said that there was not enough to go around, but that made no difference, for all the wolves, even the hungry ones, knew that the philanthropists were very good men. I said all, but in reality there was one who did not. He had actually the ingratitude to say that the piece of food that he had devoured, although cooked in a manner strange to him, still tasted uncommonly like his own brother. He also maintained that the benevolent philanthropists had saved the major part of the feast for themselves. For this ingratitude he was immediately cursed under the name of socialist, and thrown out of the pack forever. Now I am that human wolf, George, and the food that I speak of is composed of these same hospitals, libraries, and museums.”

Wilmot had been moving uneasily in his chair throughout this long speech, but now he turned almost fiercely on Hardy.

"But you can't deny," he cried, "that the money aristocracy of to-day is open to all, rich and poor alike. Men rise to it from every station in life."

"Ay, rise to it," said Hardy, "or fall to it, whichever you will. Once men were knighted for an heroic deed on the battlefield, but now they are crowned with a golden crown for a stealthy move in the stock market."

He stopped speaking for a minute, and the hot anger that had risen to his eyes died away, while a great sadness slowly took its place.

"Go your way, Wilmot," he continued in a lower tone, "for your way is not my way."

"Do you mean," cried George in a strangely altered tone, "that you are going to leave me after these two years we've been together? You're not going to move out of the apartment, Bill?"

Hardy rose slowly to his feet, so that he towered over us. "No," said he, "but you are lost to me. No longer will you see my face, nor hear my voice, for I am gone from your life forever. Sometimes you will mourn for me, as for a long lost friend, and it may be at the last that I will return and whisper to you, but you have chosen and we must part. Noman will guide you then, and lead you to the home of your desires no doubt, but I will be far away. Pray to your God then, Wilmot, even if he be the golden calf, and beseech him that you see my face no more, for, if you do, it is written in the big book that it will be terrible before your eyes."

So saying, this seeming madman walked out through

the doorway, leaving me in a mental daze of wonderment. I looked across at George Wilmot, and saw that his round face had turned to a greenish white, while his underlip trembled woefully, like a little child's on the point of tears. Seeing my gaze fixed upon him he attempted a pitifully weak smile and tapped his forehead with a shaking finger.

"Mad," he gasped finally, "stark, staring mad! That's what comes of all this socialistic rot that he's been talking these months past," and rising on a pair of very unsteady legs he went to the table and poured himself a glass of whiskey that he downed at a gulp. Then a slight color slowly returned to his ashy cheeks.

"Damn the man," he cried, sinking back into his chair once more. "He's upset me terribly. My heart's a trifle weak, nothing serious you know, but a sudden shock is very bad for me. He should have thought of that," he finished in a plaintive tone.

"Do you really think that he has gone off his head?" I asked. "Perhaps we had better have a doctor in to look at him. What do you think?"

"Oh, no," said he hurriedly; "for he often carries on like this, maybe not quite so badly, but, never fear, he'll be all right in the morning."

"But maybe we had better stay at home to-night and look after him?" I ventured.

"And turn Dick Noman down?" cried George. "Not for a minute."

"Then why not take him with us?"

At this George laughed aloud. "Why he hates Noman worse than poison," said he. "I never could get them together in any possible way."

"What's the trouble?" I asked.

"That's hard to tell," he answered. "It may be

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some old standing grudge between the two men. They knew and hated each other long before I came to town," and he began to fumble with his watch fob. "It must be getting late," he said a few minutes afterward, and then, after a look at his watch, "It's half past ten and we had better be moving."

"But if the man's not responsible for his actions, I certainly hate to leave him alone."

"Oh, he's all right," cried George impatiently. "It's just a grouch, that's all. Come along."

Reluctantly I put on my hat and coat and followed George Wilmot out into the night.



## CHAPTER VIII

We hailed a belated taxicab outside of the apartment and were soon gliding through the streets of the city. As we sped further downtown I gazed through the windows and wondered at the great moving electric signs, and the swarms of humanity on either side of the street. At this time of night in my home town nearly all the good citizens were safe in bed, and very probably snoring lustily, but here it seemed that the whole city was awake and enjoying itself feverishly.

George had little or nothing to say, evidently still thinking of the strange conduct of Hardy, and therefore I had a full opportunity to use my eyes. This life was all new to me, and you may be sure that I made the best of my chance.

As we dodged in and out through the thickly congested traffic I marveled at the skill of our chauffeur. He seemed to have at least a dozen separate eyes, guiding the car through seemingly impossible places, and ever on the lookout for some pedestrian who hadn't enough sense to look out for himself.

Many of the crowd, crossing from one side of the street to the other, might be classed as sleep-walkers. With bowed heads and unseeing eyes they would pass directly in front of our taxi, only to come to life with a ludicrous start as they heard the tooting of the horn or the loud voice of the chauffeur. I wondered at the indifference of these men, until I remembered the words of Norman on the cheapness of human life.

"If I had to run this car for a month," I said to my-

self, "I'd be a nervous wreck," and I marveled still more at the stolid composure of the man at the wheel.

Suddenly we turned down a side street for a hundred yards, and drew up before the electric sign of Maxim's. We both got out, and, after George had paid the chauffeur, mounted the stairs and soon were sitting at a little table in the corner of the restaurant, looking at the people about us.

"We've beaten the theater crowd to it," said George. "See how empty the place is," and indeed, as I glanced about me I saw that the room was barely half full.

There was a certain air of listlessness in the very atmosphere that even I perceived. Somehow I felt that these tired people about me were trying very hard to have a good time, and failing miserably at it.

Even the girl who was dancing from one table to another, singing, "Come along, come along, etc.," had a forced smile on her face and a monotonous cadence in her voice, while her audience gave her little or no encouragement.

There were two people at a nearby table who drew my attention. They were so evidently bored with each other's society and immediate surroundings that it was very amusing to watch them.

One was a striking looking girl of perhaps twenty. Her dark eyes looked past her escort unseeing into space, while her listless hand played with the stem of the wine glass before her. The girl's slender body drooped in the chair, like a frost-bitten flower, and every action, every unconscious movement, from her downcast eyelashes to her red pouting lips, suggested an unhealthy fatigue of the mind and body, that seemed well nigh impossible in one so young.

The man who sat opposite her seemed no less fa-

tigued in his own way. He was still young, well under thirty, as I found out afterward, but at a first glance he appeared middle aged, or even elderly. This impression was strengthened by his ungainly body, which was grossly fat, and his premature baldness, which had been brought about through earlier dissipation. Added to this he had small pig eyes, and red bloated features, that habitually wore an expression of discontent, while his large mouth, when not forming words, remained half open, as though the man were in a continual state of wonderment. I heard his voice from time to time as he spoke to the girl in a plaintive whining tone.

"Nothing tastes good any more," he was saying dolefully. "Once I enjoyed everything, and it was a pleasure to eat, but now—" and he stopped to put an oyster into his mouth.

"The trouble with you, Charley, is that you never take any exercise," broke in the girl. "You sit in the club all day long. There's never a time, if I pass there, that I don't see you staring out of the window, like a bullfrog out of a puddle. What do you do it for?"

"Oh, I don't know," he answered with a vacant stare; "to see the people go by I fancy."

The girl burst into a laugh at this. "To be sure," said she, "but what I mean is, why don't you do something, something with your hands, some kind of exercise to make a man of you. You're nothing but a big fat puppet now. Sometimes when I look at you I feel that at any little jar you'd burst like a toy balloon, and the feeling is very uncomfortable."

The man called Charley put up a soft flabby hand in protest at this. "Oh, come now, Edna," said he, "go easy on a fellow, won't you. I tried to exercise once, to play some game. What was it now? I quite for-

get, but I know that I had to strike a ball against the wall, and it hurt my hand terribly."

"Handball, I suppose," said she.

"That was it," cried Charley, "and what a dreadful game it was. The sweat ran down into my eyes, and all the fellows laughed to see me miss the ball. I never tried again. Sitting in the alcove at the club, watching the smart people walk up the avenue, is far more to my taste."

I turned to George. "Wouldn't you think," I whispered, "that a good-looking girl like that would pick a real man for a companion, in place of that mess she has with her?"

Wilmot seemed strangely shocked at my words. "You don't know who he is," said he in a very low tone indeed.

"No," said I. "Who is he?"

"He," said George in a stage whisper, "is the only son of J. L. Wilkinson."

"And J. L. Wilkinson?" I asked.

Then George, in a pained voice, on account of my ignorance, began to explain that J. L. Wilkinson was one of the most successful bankers in the city.

"And who is she?" I asked when he had finished.

"Edna Courtney they call her," said he. "Noman pointed her out to me one time. She had only been in town about a week then."

"Then she isn't a city girl?"

"Oh, no; just one of the little stage-struck girls that drift in each season with an ambition to be a Broadway star, and about as much chance of making it as a cat has to catch its own tail. I say she was like that when she first landed here, but now—" and he stopped short.

"Well?" I asked.

He drew out a cigarette from his gold case and lit it before he answered.

"Now," said he very leisurely between puffs, "she knows the ropes and is playing the game like a little general. Mind you, she still thinks she's a great actress—you can't always knock that idea out of their heads—but she's going after it in a better way than most."

"How is that?"

"Well," continued George, with a slightly pompous air, "I think you can divide these girls into three classes. Now the first, or the quite inefficient class, come to town with the idea in their heads that they'll be leading ladies in about three weeks. They immediately go to the different stage managers and get the door for their pains. Either their voices are poor or else maybe they're cross-eyed and bow-legged, but, anyhow, we'll say that the good productions turn them down. Then it's either a case of hoof it back to the meadows or get a job in some sad show and deal out amusement to the home-coming sailors. Either way, their hopes are nipped in the bud."

"But how about the second class?" I asked.

"The second class is made up of the girls that get accepted on their looks. These get, generally speaking, very little further than the show girl job, which in itself is scarcely a success. What makes them a failure is the fact that they have never studied for the stage, and are, in most cases, poor ignorant girls with scarcely any education. While learning to dance gracefully and look well, they imagine that they are becoming great artists, and are happy, but after the show has been introduced, and it's a case of rehearsing and acting on the same day, and every day, they soon discover that

they have no time to study for higher things in their profession, and therefore they remain just show girls.

"If they don't marry well, these girls, after they have lost their charms, drift down to the position of the first class, and minister mirth to the home-coming sailors."

"And how about the third class?" I asked. "Do they too land on the rocks?"

"Sometimes they do, and sometimes they don't," said George. "That class is personified in Edna Courtney," he continued. "She sized up the battle at the first glance, and acted accordingly. 'What chance have I, a poor country girl, without friends or money?' she asked herself, and then went out that very same night and got both.

"She roped young Wilkinson, in other words, and since then she's been on velvet. Singing lessons, elocution, and the Lord knows what he hasn't given her. I shouldn't be surprised if he financed a show for her next year so that she could have the leading rôle. She's in soft, all right. Yes, she's done remarkably well so far, and even has a chance of coming out ahead of the game."

"I don't see anything to stop her," I replied.

"Two things," broke in Wilmot, "conceit and fickleness. The one she has herself, while the other is a trait of Wilkinson's."

"What do you mean?"

"Well," continued George, growing more pompous each minute, "suppose that she has an exalted idea of herself, and that in fact she never could make a good actress, even with the money backing. That would knock her ambitions on the head, wouldn't it? On the

other hand, let us consider Wilkinson. He's liable to get tired of her and chuck her over for some other girl, and if he does the money goes with him. She would be a very lucky girl to find anyone as easy as that again, and without her financial backing she'd lose out surely, so you see she is skating on pretty thin ice. She's got a chance though, a very slim chance. Noman agrees with me on this. We had a long talk on that very thing the other day."

I felt instinctively that Noman had not agreed with George, but that George had agreed with Noman, still I kept the thought all to myself.

"It's a pretty hard place for a girl to get along in," George continued, "but it's their own fault for coming. I haven't the slightest pity for them, not the slightest. They can sink or swim, so far as I am concerned," and he laughed a trifle boisterously, it seemed to me.

"Damn all the heavy problem work!" he cried a little later. "I'll be getting as bad as Hardy, if I don't watch out. What will you have to drink, Jim?"

"A rye highball," said I.

"Here, waiter, two rye highballs, and hurry it up. By the way, that reminds me, Jim," and he drew out his wallet and passed me a twenty-dollar bill. "I almost forgot that you lost all your money."

"But you can settle for the check, and I can get some money the day after to-morrow."

"No, no," said George; "take this. Noman might think that you were a piker if he saw me paying all the bills. Be sure and buy a little too, because he always likes a good spender."

"Thanks," said I. "Buy I will for you fellows, but I'm going pretty easy myself. I still feel the effects of last night's party."

He gave me a peculiar smile. "That's up to you," said he.

As I sipped my highball I glanced about me and noticed a strange change in the people. Before they had seemed bored and indifferent, while now they were talkative, nervous and restless, as though they were waiting impatiently for something to happen. The girl at the next table laughed a shrill laugh.

"Why, Charley," she cried, "I believe you were falling asleep. Wake up, the theater crowd is coming."

The fat man turned toward the door with a yawn, and then his face brightened and the sleepiness went out of his eyes. "So they are!" he cried.

Even as he spoke many people were entering the room, taking tables in the gallery or else downstairs where we sat, and filling the half-empty café from wall to wall. At the heels of the last gaudy group to enter I saw the tall and graceful figure of Noman, apparently all by himself. He loomed above those that he followed, so that he reminded me forcibly of the shepherds that I had often seen at home driving their sheep into the pen.

As he traversed the room he bowed repeatedly to people on all sides of him, and although he did not appear to see us he made straight for our table.

"Didn't I tell you he was the best liked man in the city?" whispered George excitedly. "See, everybody knows him."

By this time Noman had reached our table. "Ah, George," he cried with an outstretched hand, "you're looking well," and then turning to me, "welcome to our city."



## CHAPTER IX

The room seemed to have taken to itself new life at the appearance of the theater crowd.

Looking about me I saw that every face now wore a smile of good humor, while the waiters hurried hither and thither, disappearing, like rabbits into their burrows, and reappearing again with steaming dishes and icy bottles.

I felt instinctively that Noman in some miraculous way was accountable for the now unrestrained joy about me. He was the sun that breaks through the clouds of despondency to lighten our hopelessness and kiss to life the green leaves of ambition. I looked at the man as he sat talking to George, with his great black eyes flashing with little gleaming lights, and the warm red blood staining his cheeks to crimson, and at that moment I did him homage in my heart.

Edna Courtney, at the next table, must have shared in my feelings, for she was gazing at Noman with parted lips and a heightened color, while even her companion seemed now fully awake, and was ordering wine of the waiter in a more sprightly tone than he had used before.

In the far corner of the room the girl had begun to sing again as she glided from one table to another. The song was the same, but now how differently rendered. It was as though it were another song and another singer, radiating from her person a kind of fierce joy and carelessness of costs that appealed to the savage in me. On she danced through the myriad of

white-clothed tables and silent smiling servitors, like a wild creature of untamed grace that charmed while it warmed the senses.

Now she held the attention of her audience, and won their approval. Some even joined, in a maudlin fashion, in the chorus of the song that she was singing, and after the music had died away they applauded till she renewed her efforts.

"This is life," cried George, seizing my arm on a sudden. "It's good to be alive, Jim."

"Yes," I repeated, "it is very good to be alive."

Noman turned his black eyes on me at this, and they flashed with a new fire. I looked into them even as I had looked into Bill Hardy's, and they warmed me like wine, so that my senses awoke to new pleasures that I had never known, and I felt that they were wreathing about my heart, tissue on tissue, and smothering it in very sweetness.

"I see that we'll be friends," was all that he said, but behind his words I felt lay a great meaning, a meaning that was as plain as the stars to see, and as inexplicable.

While gazing into his eyes I felt that we were alone together, all alone, looking down at the world that we had left below us. That writhing, many-headed monster in the distance was life, and it had threatened us, but we had soared above it, up and up into the soft solitude of the clouds, and now its distorted horror was veiled to us forever.

"Wake up!" cried George in my very ear. "You're not letting one little highball put you to sleep, are you?"

Noman put up a white, strong hand in protest at this. "He is a literary genius, and therefore a dreamer,

George," said he, "and you must not break the chain of his thoughts with too rough a hand."

"Thoughts be damned!" cried George. "I want to know what he'll have to drink, that's all."

"The same as before," I answered a trifle haughtily, for I began to feel a great contempt for my old friend's character, and to realize the inferiority of his intellect compared to mine. Noman seemed to harbor the same thoughts, for he gave me a little sidelong glance that told me as plainly as though he had spoken that George's coarseness of speech and manner irritated him greatly, but that he intended putting up with it, and that I had better do likewise.

"Do you know," said he to George, "I believe I read your friend's thoughts in his eyes just now."

"Oh, come now, that's a little bit too much," broke in Wilmot.

"On the contrary," resumed Noman, "I think that, if I have his permission, I can convince you."

"Go ahead," I answered, "and if you're right, I'll tell you so."

"Well then," he began, "it seemed to me that you were thinking of the folly that it was to examine the monster life with too keen an eye, or, in other words, you came to the very evident truth, that it is far better to blind ourselves to the drudgery of existence, as we are doing now, with a veil of pleasure, rather than to see it in all its naked sordidness. You very probably pictured yourself, as you are in reality, way above it, and looking down. Am I right?"

I nodded in amazement. "But how—" I began.

"Oh," he broke in, "don't bother about that. It's a gift that I've had all my life. But your philosophy is right," he continued, "and that is the main thing. See

these people about us," and he indicated them by a wave of his arm. "Look at them now, living up to the top notch of pleasure and excitement. Their business cares and worries, and monotonous life itself, are cast away like an old cloak, to be worn again in the morning it is true, but for the moment these men and women are exalted beings, clothed in purple. Thus does the city reward her faithful toilers."

At this George broke in impatiently. He had finished the drink before him, and evidently his earlier potations of the evening were beginning to have their effect on him, for his eyes were dim and blood-shot, while his face wore that foolish solemnity of expression that is common with so many drunkards.

"Faithful toilers," he muttered thickly. "Faithful toilers nothing. I'm no faithful toiler, you can bet on that. I'm working for myself, and for nothing and nobody else. No toiling for mine. I'm a business man," and then he prodded Noman in the ribs, while a cunning look crept up into his eyes, "and not very faithful, Dick, not very faithful," and he winked knowingly at the other.

Noman broke out into a great laugh, that shook his giant frame, and brought the tears to his eyes. "You're a clever one, George, a mighty clever one," he cried at last. "A shrewd business man you are, and you'll get your pile, no fear about that."

Then he turned to me. "Are you acquainted with any literary men in the city?" he asked, and then, when I had replied in the negative, "I'll take you around and introduce you to some, if you have nothing to do next Monday," said he. "What do you say? I have a good many friends on the different magazines."

"It's certainly kind of you," I cried warmly, "but I'm afraid it might be inconvenient——"

"Oh, no, not at all," he broke in. "I'd like to see you make good in the city, and indeed I'm sure you will."

Again the waiter filled our empty glasses, and in a moment more, as it seemed to me, he was back filling them again. George by this time was in a kind of drunken stupor, leaning back against the wall, his face gone a deathly white and great black hollows under his eyes. As I looked from Noman, with his ruddy skin, to the sallow wreck beside him, the contrast was so striking that it penetrated even my befogged brain. They looked like the personification of life and death sitting there side by side.

"He's in a pretty bad way," I whispered to Noman.

"Oh, he's all right," he answered. "Let him stay here for a while, and we'll go over to the next table. I want you to meet Edna Courtney and Wilkinson. They're old friends of mine."

By this time my own head was reeling from the highballs, and so it was on a very unsteady pair of legs that I crossed to the other table and met Noman's friends.

They both welcomed us with enthusiasm, Wilkinson ordering another bottle of wine from the waiter immediately. I sat next to Miss Courtney, while Noman plunged into conversation with her companion. From time to time I caught disconnected fragments of their talk as I listened to the girl beside me.

"If life bores you," I heard Noman say, "forget life. You're in a position to do it if ever a man was."

"But things don't amuse me like they used to," said the other, "wine, women and the rest of it."

"I know," said Noman, "but there are other things besides that," and he lowered his voice so that I lost what he was saying entirely.

Meanwhile Edna Courtney was telling me the story of her life, and a very uninteresting story it was from the scattered sentences that I heard every now and then.

"Yes, and I was a rube for fair once," she was saying. "You'd never have guessed it, if I hadn't told you, would you?"

"No," I answered, "I certainly wouldn't."

"And what do you think," she continued with a nervous laugh, "I was in love too before I came to town. He used to take me to the Sunday school picnics at home, and buy me ice cream and candy, just as much as I could eat, and give me rides on the merry-go-round, till I was 'most sick. Gee, but he was good to me!"

Her dark eyes looked past me into space as she continued to speak, while her thin hands lay clasped on the table before her.

"Little yap that I was," she went on a trifle wistfully, "I used to be dead stuck on Tom and the Sunday school picnics. Coming home in the market wagons we all used to sing, and some of the boys, I remember, used to play harmonicas too."

Suddenly she stopped short, and then continued in a strange, surprised voice:

"I was happier then, I believe, than I ever was in my whole life, than I am now," and she looked about her with bright startled eyes.

High up in the balcony men and women were throwing long narrow rolls of paper that were slowly forming into a gigantic many-colored spider's web above our heads. Through this I saw a man bending down

over the railing gazing at us intently. For a fraction of a second his eyes met mine, and I knew that he was Bill Hardy.

When I looked again he was gone.

## CHAPTER X

When I awoke the next morning the events of the night before seemed like the fragments of a dream. By taxing my memory to the uttermost I could remember leaving Maxim's with Noman, supporting the sagging body of George between us, of hailing a solitary cab, of bidding a fond farewell to the giggling Miss Courtney and the sodden Mr. Wilkinson, and of finally whirling through the silent streets to the apartment, but further my throbbing brain refused to act. How I ever succeeded in dragging Wilmot to bed, or how I even got there myself, were mysteries too complex for me to solve.

As I lay staring stupidly at the broad band of sunlight streaming in through the half-open window I heard a low groan, and, on turning over on my other side with some effort, I saw the pale face and the disheveled hair of George sticking out from the bed-clothes of a cot in the far corner, looking like some fierce and prehistoric bird breaking out of its egg.

His whole appearance was so ludicrous that at any other time I must have burst out into a laugh at the very sight of him, but in my present state of mind I could but summon a weak and sickly smile to my face.

"Get me some water," he gasped, "for I'm dry as hell! Touch that button on the wall, will you? God, I'm sick," he ended in a kind of wail, and his head popped under the bed-clothes again, whence came little grunts and groans of anguish from time to time.



I complied with his request by pressing the button, and soon the little dark butler entered on tiptoe. No sooner had the door shut behind him than Wilmot's head shot out from the bed-clothes again, and he greeted the appearance of the man with a perfect volley of oaths.

"What do you mean, you ——, by not answering the bell sooner? Take your time, will you, you ——! You'll get your damn carcass out of this place, bag and baggage, the first thing that you know," and his voice subsided to indistinct mutterings.

I watched the butler's face as he listened to George's tirade, and there was not so much as the fluttering of an eyelid to indicate that he was the least affected by the abuse hurled at his head. It was as though he had no feelings, and indeed as I grew to know the man better I began to consider him not as a human being like myself, but as some sort of machine, formed by a master mechanic to wait upon our every want.

George's fury began to wax greater again at the servant's silence and seeming indifference. "Well," he cried at last, with another oath, "what have you got to say for yourself?"

Then this man, with the same stolidity of expression, opened his mouth and spoke, and, impossible as it may seem, at that moment I felt a strange physical surprise that he could speak. Indeed throughout the months that followed I could never become accustomed to his voice, and it would invariably startle me out of my natural composure. Of course it is a commonplace thing for a man to talk, and, in fact, an uncommon thing when he cannot, but in this case I felt that it was as unnatural and diabolic as to see an elephant standing on his trunk.

I thrilled for a moment with all those uncanny sensations that a child would experience could he meet the ghost of his dreams face to face, and, as ridiculous as it may seem, I became bathed in a cold sweat from head to foot.

"I came as soon as I could, sir," he said in a metallic tone. "What can I get you, sir?"

"Damn your lies!" cried George. "Water, of course."

"Hot or cold, sir?"

"Cold, you fool, cold of course," cried Wilmot, working himself up into a very paroxysm of rage, and then he turned to me: "Here I am burning with fever, Jim, and this —— butler would give me boiling water. Get out, you ——," and he made a movement as though he were going to spring out of bed.

The servant stole silently out of the room and returned a few minutes later with a clinking pitcher of ice-water.

"Tell me, George, where did you get that man?" I asked after the butler had left the room to prepare our baths, and we had both helped ourselves plentifully to the ice-water.

"He answered my advertisement in the paper when I first moved here," said George in a tired voice.

"A pretty good butler?" I ventured.

"Oh, yes, good enough," said he, "but he hasn't any spirit. You see the way I cuss him out. He's like a nigger down south—he thinks all the more of you for doing it. I always thought that these Russians were a blood-thirsty bunch, but——"

"Is he a Russian?" I broke in.

"Of Russian descent. Says he lived most of his life in England. But how do you feel now?"

"A little better, thanks to the water," I replied; "but how about you?"

"Like the wrath of God," moaned George. "My head's swimming round and round. What a party we must have had!"

"You can't remember much about it?" I suggested.

"Not a bit," said he, shaking his head mournfully from side to side. "I didn't get into any trouble, a fight or anything like that, did I? I feel confoundedly stiff and sore all over."

"Not that I can remember," said I, "for, to tell you the truth, I can't make out myself how we got home. Noman must have taken care of us, I guess."

"What a pair of sick babies we must have been," cried George, shamefacedly. "I wonder what he could have thought of us? I wish I could hold my liquor better."

"And so do I."

Just at this minute there came a tap on the door, and the butler entered to tell us that our baths were ready. Soon I was lying in the tub absorbing the moisture through my parched, feverish body. I followed the hot bath by taking a cold shower that brought some of my healthy appetite back to me, so that when I sat down to the breakfast table at length I could do more than toy with the food before me. By George's plate was a drink that he called an eye-opener, and which, after he had consumed to the last drop, brought back a slight tinge of color to his flabby cheeks and a gleam of light to his dull eyes.

"Where's Hardy this morning?" I asked.

"Probably gone to church," sneered George. "He gets up and goes to bed with the sun, you know."

All through the meal Wilmot kept nagging and

bullying the patient butler, until the thing got on even my nerves, and I wondered how the man could put up with it. The little Russian's face however still wore the same stolid indifference that had marked it before, and he went about his various duties with an alertness and willingness that made me blush for George's conduct.

After breakfast we adjourned to the sitting-room, and there I told Wilmot, with the candor of college days, that he didn't know a good servant when he saw one, and that he would be losing the butler in short order, whereupon he shot me an ugly look.

"Nonsense," said he, "I tell you he thinks the world of me. I've been treating him this way for over a year now, and he's getting more devoted to me each day."

"Of course it's none of my business," said I, "but it seems to me that out of mere humanity you ought to treat him better. Why I wouldn't speak to a dog like that."

"Damn you, Jim!" he cried, "don't talk like Hardy. I won't stand for it!" and he jumped to his feet.

"Oh, very well," I answered coldly. "If you don't like my company, why that's easily mended. I'll pack my suitcase and get out," and I went into the bedroom, while he sank back into his chair once more.

I threw my few belongings into the grip with little heed to neatness or order, for, to tell the truth, I was boiling with anger at my old friend. When I re-entered the sitting-room on the way to the front door, I saw something that brought me to a standstill on the instant.

George was still sitting in the chair where I had left him, only now the anger had faded from his face,

while in the place of it was depicted a kind of childish grief that was almost ludicrous in a full-grown man. The tears were standing in his eyes, and even running down his plump cheeks, while every now and then a spasmodic sob would rack his despondent figure.

"So," he cried, jumping to his feet, "you're going to leave me now?" and he regarded me reproachfully with tear-dimmed eyes.

"Come," I cried sharply, "brace up, man, and be your self. You can't expect me to stay here and let you insult me, can you?"

"That's right," he broke in with a kind of wail, "leave me, everybody leaves me, and I haven't a friend in the world. Yesterday Hardy turned me down, and now you," and he burst out suddenly into such unrestrained girlish weeping that it was very pitiful to hear him.

"Brace up, man, brace up!" I cried, putting my hand on his shoulder, while in a flash all my anger died quite away. "I'll stay, don't worry, but for Heaven's sake, brace up!"

"Take me to bed," he whimpered. "My nerves have all gone to pieces. I'm sick, that's the trouble with me," and indeed he looked it, with his face the color of ashes and his eyes all red and bloodshot in his head.

I helped him into the other room, and he dropped down on the bed like a log of wood, so that the springs groaned woefully under the sudden weight.

"Don't leave me, Jim," he faltered in the voice of a frightened child. "Stay with me here, for I want to talk to you."

I drew up a chair within a yard of the bed and sat down to listen to what he had to say.

"Jim," said he, "can you hear me?" and then when

I had nodded in assent, "Bill Hardy is to blame for this," he continued very slowly and distinctly.

"How so?" I asked.

"Why, you heard what he said last night, didn't you, how he gave me up and all that?"

"But I thought he got on your nerves, and that you didn't like him any more?"

He began to shake his head slowly from side to side at this. "I didn't mean it," said he at last, "that is to say, not altogether. You see, when a fellow lives as long with another as I have with Hardy it's a tough thing to fall out with him like this."

"Yes, I should think so," I replied.

"I'll never forget the first time I met him," resumed Wilmot.

"How was that?" I asked.

"Why, it was in the country," said he. "I'd been out with Noman the night before, and we'd been hitting it hard and heavy. The next morning when I woke up I felt terribly hot and thirsty. It was one of those warm Sundays in late spring when a fellow begins to long for the country. I got to thinking how fine it would be to take a walk in the meadows, with the flowers underfoot and free to pick if you wanted to, not like they are in the parks, and the first thing I knew I was on a train headed toward the wilds of Long Island.

"Well, I got off at one of those little places that are barely on the map and started hiking over hill and dale, pretending that I was a kid again. I forgot to say that I stopped in a little old-fashioned store and bought some crackers and cheese, intending to camp out somewhere and have lunch.

"Well, as I say, I was beating across country, feeling

my oats in the clear air, when what should I meet but a stray dog coming in the opposite direction. He stopped right before me and wagged his tail, while he looked up hungrily at the bag, that I held under my arm, and so what could I do but throw him a cracker. He devoured it at a gulp, barked once in sign of friendship, and followed close at my heels for the rest of the day.

"I found a great place at last, on the mossy bank of a little brook surrounded by trees, and there I laid out my lunch, while the dog crouched at my feet, gazing up into my face with his great brown wistful eyes, until I tossed him a good half of my food.

"I don't remember ever being so happy since I was a little kid as I was on that afternoon. The birds were singing, the brook was rippling past, and the shadows were playing about me, as I lay back in the tall grass sucking at my pipe, till all at once, quite unconsciously, I fell fast asleep.

"How long I lay there I can't say, but it was late afternoon when I woke up to find a man bending over me, shaking me by the shoulder. I looked up into the strangest pair of eyes I had ever seen, although now, to save my life, I couldn't describe them.

" 'You were asleep,' said Bill Hardy, for it was he.

" 'Yes,' I answered, staring about me in a bewildered fashion, and then noticing that the sun was sinking low in the west. 'By Jove, I've got to get back to town.'

" 'Why?' said he quite simply, regarding me the while with a curious expression in his eyes.

"Now comes the strange part, the part that I cannot understand. Here was a man that I had never seen before apparently asking me a ridiculously childish

question, and here was I, a man of the world, so shaken out of my self-possession that I had no words with which to reply.

“‘Why?’ I stammered. ‘Why?’

“‘Yes,’ said he quickly, ‘why? You belong here,’ he continued with a broad sweep of his arm, that took in the woods, the green meadows stretching away, and even the red sun sinking behind the black tree-trunk. ‘This is your home, for you love it. You are the child of the earth, and from your hands should spring forth the treasures of the earth. Nature is your mother, and yet in your wilful ignorance you would disfigure her face with sores, the sores of civilization, and then because the scab cities cover from your view the wounds that you have made, you cry out in delight, “This, all this have I done.” You suck the milk from your mother’s bosom, and then, reaching up, pluck out her eyes with your venomous talons, crying all the while your parrot-learned lesson, “This is the wonderful age, the golden age.” If there be a God, and a cruel God, he is doubled up with silent laughter in the heavens.’ He stopped for breath, but still looked at me fixedly.

“‘Naturally I could make neither head nor tail of his strange words, but such was the peculiar mental state that I was in that, in some unaccountable way, I felt abashed in his presence, so that I hung my head like a guilty schoolboy before him.

“‘Come,’ he continued more quickly, ‘we will go back to the city, you and I, and meet this civilization face to face.’

“‘Not another word was said, but silently the three of us, Hardy, the stray dog and myself, went back to the station and caught the evening train. That was



how I first met Hardy. Later I grew to know him better, and we took this apartment together."

"And the dog," I asked, "what became of him?"

"I kept him for a long time, a matter of two years I should judge, but finally he died."

"You lived with Hardy all that time?"

"Yes," mumbled George in a sleepy tone, "and he was good to me, and Noman could never agree with him, never."

For many minutes there was silence in the room, except for the heavy regular breathing of Wilmot. He had fallen fast asleep.

## CHAPTER XI

Noman was as good as his word. Monday morning he dropped in, as flushed with health as ever, to take me to see some of his magazine friends.

"Bring something along with you, if you have anything ready," said he.

As luck would have it I had a type-written short story and two poems in my suitcase that I had brought up to read to George. These I hurriedly slipped into my inside pocket, and we were soon gliding down town in a taxicab.

It was barely eleven o'clock, and the streets were crowded with the usual bustling throng. Noman was gazing out of the window at the hurrying people, his great black eyes dancing with joy, and his dark handsome face wreathed in smiles.

"I love them all," he cried in his deep voice. "See how they push and scramble along, the weak giving place to the strong, on and on."

"Where?" said I, glancing out in my turn, and catching a glimpse of a face through a shop window that bore a striking resemblance to Hardy's as I did so.

"To nowhere," cried Noman with a grating laugh and a sudden change of tone, "and that's the beauty of it."

"What?" said I, turning about in surprise.

He colored ever so slightly. "That is, I should say," he explained, "that most of those we see are the weak, and therefore are unable to get anywhere. But how

is George? Did he get down to the bank this morning?"

"Yes," I answered, "although he is still feeling a bit off-color. He seems to think that Hardy has left the apartment for good. The man's been missing since Saturday night, and it has cut George up a whole lot."

"What's the fellow's name?"

"Bill Hardy," I replied. "I think I saw him just now through a shop window, as we were passing."

Noman turned to me with a very serious air. "Let me give you a piece of advice," said he; "if you want to succeed in the city you don't want to have much to do with this fellow Hardy. He exerts a bad influence over everybody, makes them discontented and restless."

"He can't have any influence with me," I broke in with all the confidence of youth. "Never you fear about that."

"I hope not," said Noman, shaking his head seriously, "for it would ruin your career. But here we are," and just at this moment the taxicab came to an abrupt halt.

"We are going to see the editor of 'Everybody's Friend' first," continued Noman, as we got out and entered the colossal building on the corner. "He's a personal friend of mine. Have known him for years."

By this time we were shooting up in the elevator. "The fourteenth floor," said Noman, and scarcely had he spoken before we were there and had stepped out into the corridor.

At the further end of the passage was a door with a heavy glass top, upon which in black letters was inscribed "Everybody's Friend." We opened this and entered a small waiting-room, partly filled by a very large table littered with many copies of the magazine,

and a boy of fifteen or sixteen busily engaged with a typewriter in one corner.

On seeing us come in this youth sprang up with great alacrity and ran forward to take Noman's hat and gloves.

"Ah, Harry," said my friend, "you're looking well I see. Is Mr. Jennings in?"

"Thank you, sir," said the boy with a broad grin. "Yes, sir, he's in, and was asking for you this morning. He'll be very glad to see you."

"Run along then, Harry, and tell him I'm here. I'm in a great hurry."

In a moment more Harry had disappeared through a door connecting with the great man's office, and we had taken our seats beside the table. When the boy returned again his face still wore the same smile, only now it had widened from ear to ear.

"He's got a long-haired guy in there now, Mr. Noman," said he, "and he's trying to sell the Boss some phony poetry. Gee, but the Boss is mad, and says that he'll shake him as soon as he can. But here he comes now!"

Just at this moment the door opened again, and a tall thin shabby man, with a great black mane of tangled hair and fierce blazing eyes, stumbled out. He was followed immediately by a clean-cut, alert, business-like person, who bowed to Noman with a wry smile, even while he kept the tail of his eye on the other.

"And then what am I to do?" cried the man with the blazing eyes in a loud hoarse voice. "Am I then to starve, Mr. Jennings?"

"Mr. Ludgrieve," said Jennings, "compose yourself, I beg you. A man of your talents need never starve.

Listen to reason, and conform to our requests. We want a lighter vein in verse. The public demands it, and we must supply them with what they want. You're entirely too morbid for us. Now perhaps the 'Vulcan' or the 'Sphere'——"

"I've tried them all, every one," broke in the other feverishly, "and it's no use. I have real poetry, and real poetry is not wanted. This is the age of the golden dollar and the tired business man, and beauty has spread her pinions and fled away from the sordid earth forever. But I ask you again, Mr. Jennings, what am I going to do?"

"And I say again," replied Jennings, evidently becoming irritated, "that you must conform to our standards. Write something light and humorous, or we will say sentimental, if you like that better, and we will pay you well for it, very well. You can do it, I know."

"Yes, I can do it," cried the shabby man, "and I can also handle a pick and shovel, and even cut my own throat, if it comes to that, but believe me the first alternative is the one that I would never choose," and then he raised his voice still louder as he continued, apparently quite unaware of our presence.

"You're a business man," he cried, "by your own estimate, nothing more nor less, so what right have you to dictate to me what I shall write, or what I shall not write? What did you ever create that gave you the power to judge between the poor and the good, between the genius and the hack writer? Is it then for you, and dozens like you, to control the world of the pen, and damn the fit as well as the unfit with your commercial standards? Supply the people with the goods that they want, is your belief, and do it you will,

at the cost of the good and the beautiful. You decree that the wise should descend to the fools, and not that the fools should rise to the wise. You poison the minds of the foolish nation with a slow and deadly poison, and then you shake each other by the hand, and call yourselves good business men. You editors——”

But at this point, Jennings, who had been getting redder in the face each moment, broke in.

“You’ve said enough, and more than enough,” he cried. “If you won’t conform to our standards, why the door’s open, so get out!”

At this the tall shabby man threw back his head and straightened himself to his full height, while his eyes burned like red-hot coals, and I saw the editor cast an anxious look in our direction.

“Conform to your standards!” cried Ludgrieve. “Do you think, little man, that you could dictate to a Poe, a Byron, or a Swinburne, and move them one iota from their course by your materialism? As for me, I will go on and join them, yes, if I have to go with naked, bleeding feet on the hard road of suffering. Death and starvation shall not hold me back from my course, even though they cast their dread shadows before me. The world will crucify me, but I, like another, shall rise again from the dead, and live forever on the sunlit heights.”

His voice died away and he stood for a moment silent, the sun streaming full on his black locks in a long, golden band, and his eyes staring past us, while slowly a transfiguring smile lit his somber face, as though he saw something beautiful and very dear to him, that we could not see, and then, in the same silence, slowly he turned and passed out of the open door, leaving us in dumb amazement staring after him.

"Gone stark mad!" said Noman at last, with a laugh. "What a wild man he is."

"He ought to be confined somewhere," cried Jennings, still very red in the face, and mopping his forehead with a silk handkerchief. "What annoyances I do have in this profession. There's hardly a day goes by that I don't have a fuss with some of them. They think they're all geniuses and that nothing's too good for them, and some with the seats fairly worn out of their trousers, too. What a world we live in!"

"I've brought one of them along with me," said Noman.

"What!" cried the magazine man in sudden astonishment. "You don't mean to tell me that your friend here is a writer?"

"Yes," answered Noman, "or, at least, he wants to be. Let me introduce Mr. Holliday, Mr. Jennings."

The editor gave me a limp, soft hand. "Very glad to know you, Mr. Holliday," said he, "for, in fact, a friend of Mr. Noman's is always a friend of mine. What is your specialty, Mr. Holliday?"

"Poetry," I answered, with a heavy heart.

Jennings' brow darkened on the instant at this, while Noman looked slightly irritated, as though my answer had displeased him in some way.

"Now isn't that unfortunate," cried the editor, "for you must know that poetry is very little in demand these days. Now, perhaps, if it is humorous verse——?"

"No," I broke in sadly, "I'm afraid it is just the opposite. I try to introduce philosophy in my verse."

Mr. Jennings held up his hands in horror at this. "My dear young man, my dear young man," he began, but Noman cut him short with little ceremony.

"Come now, don't fly off the handle, Jennings," said he. "I don't think my friend," and he laid emphasis on friend, "will be as hard to reason with as Ludgrieve was. He can write humorous verse and, what's better yet, light prose, too, when it comes to that. He won't prove to be an obstinate fool like that wild man, because he knows that good old saying too well, 'When you're in Rome do as the Romans do.' You won't disappoint me, Jim, and throw your chances away, will you?"

I had it on the tip of my tongue to tell him that I would write to please myself and nobody else, but there was that in his quiet, persuasive voice, and in his eyes, as they looked into mine, that made me say quite the reverse.

"I want to make money," I cried, a little breathlessly, "and the easier I get it, why the better it suits me."

"That's the spirit," shouted Noman and the editor in unison, and each seized one of my hands and shook it warmly.



## CHAPTER XII

When I left the building I was alone and without my story and poems. Noman had pleaded an early engagement and had left an hour before, while the editor, after advising me thoroughly on my future in literature, had taken my manuscripts to read over, as he said.

"Go home," he told me, "and write a story of everyday life, with lots of action, and with little or no character study, and I feel convinced that you will be able to dispose of it. The public wants no problems to work out, unless it is the sex question. Give us as much of that as you can. We can handle it all."

"But," said I, "don't you think that that subject is pretty nearly played out? Hundreds of writers have taken a try at it."

"Never," he answered, "as long as there is such a thing as passion in the world. Give them the old problem served up in a different manner and they will devour it like a pack of hungry wolves."

As I walked along in the bracing air, rubbing shoulders with my fellow men, I felt as sure of success as though I had already reached the topmost rung of the ladder.

"With my gifts for writing," I said to myself, "it will be no trouble for me at all to write five or six of the so-called popular novels in one year. I have but to take one of the old machine-made plots, fill in with some borrowings from other writers, picking discriminately, of course, so as to create an impression of

originality with the masses, add a little immorality to season it for the reading palate, and, lo, I will be a famous man in no time."

Just as I was soliloquizing thus I felt a touch on my shoulder and, wheeling about, came face to face with Bill Hardy.

"Hello," I said. "Where have you been keeping yourself? I haven't seen you since Saturday."

"Staying with a friend for a couple of days," he answered. "I just saw you coming out of the Merton Building and followed you up."

There was something about the man's voice that irritated me strangely, so that when I spoke it was in a slightly pompous tone.

"Oh, yes, I've been having a chat with the editor of 'Everybody's Friend.'"

"Is that so?" said he, raising his eyebrows ever so slightly. "My friend had a talk with the very same man this morning."

"Your friend?" I cried. "He isn't a tall, thin man with long black hair, is he?"

"Just so," said Hardy. "Did you see him?"

"Yes, I saw him all right," I answered curtly, "and heard him, too. He raised the very devil of a fuss up there," and I went on and told him of the scene between the shabby man and the editor.

"Well, what do you think of him?" he asked when I had done.

"I think," said I, still feeling unaccountably irritated and out of sorts, "that he is the damnedest fool I ever saw!"

Hardy smiled a sad, slow smile. "Why?" he asked quite simply.

"It's plain enough," I cried angrily, "for anyone to

see. Here's a very poor man, so poor, indeed, that, on his own confession, he is threatened with starvation, and yet this idiot is so pigheaded that he refuses to write what the editor tells him to write. Rank lunacy I call it."

"And yet," said Bill Hardy quietly, "great men have ever stood out against the world, against overpowering odds, and in this lies their greatness. When they are alive they are called fools, but when they are dead they are immortalized."

"I'd rather get what I could right here," I broke in, "and let the future take care of itself. I've only got one life to live."

"Jim," said he, turning away from me, "you will never be a great man," and without another word he disappeared down a side street, leaving me staring after him stupidly.

At length I came out of my mental daze or whatever it was with a start and drew a long breath of relief.

"I'm glad he's gone," I muttered, and the load of irritation that had been growing on me in the man's company vanished completely, leaving me my old egotistical self once more.

"How could George put up with the fellow as long as he did?" I asked myself as I walked along, and the favorable opinion that I had of Hardy changed to a positive dislike in my mind. For a self-centered man to experience doubt of himself is almost a physical pain, and while I had been talking to Hardy I felt this unpleasant feeling stirring more than once within me.

When I reached the apartment George was already home from the bank.

"I still feel beastly sick," he said, leaning back list-

lessly in the Morris chair. "The figures began to dance before my eyes and I had to leave early."

"I wish I didn't have to work at all," he continued a little later and his voice had a whining tone to it like a peevish child's. "When I see fellows like Wilkinson lolling about in club windows doing nothing but eating and drinking all day it fairly makes a Socialist out of me."

"But," I broke in, "Wilkinson said only the other night that he was getting tired of everything."

"That's just for effect," cried George. "I wish I had a chance to try it for a while and I bet I wouldn't get tired of everything. Edna Courtney alone, I think, would keep my interest up in things. I saw her to-day. She certainly is a queen," and he sighed a long-drawn sigh.

"You're not falling in love with Miss Courtney?" I asked.

"And why not if I want to?" he cried sharply. "She's a queen, I tell you, and I'd like to star her myself if I had the coin," and he smiled grimly. "I might just as well fall in love with the lady in the moon for any good that it will do me, or, at least, as long as Wilkinson is easy money. But tell me about your talk with the editor. How did you make out?"

I told him about my morning's adventures and he seemed overjoyed at the outcome. "That's what comes of having a friend like Noman," he repeated over and over again.

"That's right, Jim," he continued a little later, "get after the money with both fists. You'll make a pile yet, and in the meanwhile send for your things and live here with me. Hardy left word with the butler that he was going to keep the room, but that he in-

tended to eat out henceforward, so you see he won't bother us any. What do you say?"

"Fine," I answered, "but you know my income is a trifle limited and I might not be able to hold up my end of the expenses."

"Nonsense," said he, "for in a month's time you'll be doubling it, never fear."

The upshot of the whole affair was that I did as he advised and wired immediately for my things, glad at heart to think that at last I was to become a permanent resident of the city.

That night George harried the silent butler to his heart's content, for somehow it didn't bother me as it had before. Once I thought that the little dark man was examining my face covertly as he stooped to place a dish before me and it unaccountably angered me so that I asked him for a glass of water in a very sharp tone.

Bill Hardy was gone from our table forever.

## CHAPTER XIII

For the next two weeks I was very busy writing a short story that would appeal to Mr. Jennings and the public at large.

It was harder work than I imagined it would be and every now and then I would have to bring myself to an abrupt halt as my pen unconsciously would wander from the subject in hand to deeper things.

One thing I noticed that troubled me, and it was that I did not take the same pleasure in my task as I had formerly. Before while writing the hours had seemed to pass with winged feet, while now my work was a form of drudgery when every minute seemed an hour and the hours an eternity.

I believe I would have given it up had I not received constant encouragement from Wilmot and Noman. They were my critics and would sit up each night listening as I read and offering a word of advice now and then.

"That's the idea," Noman would cry, "write about the ultra-fashionable world—the four hundred—and make it as ridiculous and far-fetched as you please, for you are writing to the ignorant masses who are unfamiliar with it and, therefore, admire it and take it all in as gospel truth."

"Your love theme is not strong enough," said George. "When the Earl of Carmody finds his wife in the arms of the bearded stranger he takes it too coolly and, besides, the whole scene is not risqué enough. Touch it up, old man, touch it up," etc., etc.

I got my manuscripts back from Jennings with a letter of an apologetic tone, saying that he was sure that I had the ability to write if I only used it in the right channels, but that he could not accept the work that I had submitted.

At last my task was accomplished and I gave the typewritten copy of my new story to Noman. He said that he would drop in to see Jennings and give it to him the very next day, but in the meanwhile would George and I go with him to the theater that night and have a little party later at Maxim's?

We consented readily enough to this and two hours later found us enjoying the "Purple Cow," one of the latest musical comedy hits. My enjoyment was caused, not through the show, which was one of the usual type, filled with vulgarity and silly horse-play, but from the fact that I had absorbed numerous cocktails at dinner.

In my exalted condition I could have thoroughly enjoyed a Punch and Judy show, or even a funeral, and at the climax of the play, when the wealthy American financier is discovered in the harem by his virtuous and irate wife hugging one of the Sultan's women, my joy and mirth knew no bounds and I believe I even applauded with as much vim as some of the females about me, and that is saying a good deal.

I will not go into details concerning our party in Maxim's. Suffice it to say that it was very similar to the other one in results at least. Mr. Wilkinson was there more depressed looking than ever with the fair Miss Courtney and later we joined them and I caught George squeezing the lady's hand when her escort's fishy eyes were turned in another direction. Later Noman tucked us both in bed, I mean Wilmot and

myself, and we woke up very sick and despondent in the morning.

Three days later I received a thin envelope from the "Everybody's Friend," and, on opening it with trembling fingers, found a check in payment for my story. It was made out for a hundred dollars and when I showed it to George such was his joy and pride in my success that he immediately proposed that we should have another party and blow the coin in, as he expressed it, which we promptly did.

That night we returned in a very demoralized condition. George could not find the keyhole and promptly swore that there was none there.

"That damned butler," he whispered, "has stopped it up. I'll fix him for that. He sleeps while I work—" and he put an unsteady finger on the doorbell and pressed it in with all his might.

In the meanwhile I leaned back against the wall and laughed until my sides ached. There was something so comical to my befogged brain in George's condition that the tears ran down my face from merriment. The harder I laughed the angrier Wilmot grew, till in a few moments he was almost foaming at the mouth.

"Damn you, stop it!" he roared. "You're drunk, that's what ails you. Can't you learn to hold your liquor like a man?" at which I laughed the louder.

"You'll be the death of me," I gasped at last, wiping the tears from my eyes.

"I will," said he, "but not the way you expect," and he turned on me threateningly, but just at that moment the door swung open and the torrent of his wrath was turned in another direction. The slim little figure of the butler, wearing a dressing-gown too big for him



and that hung on the ground in the back like a lady's train, stood in the doorway.

"So there you are," cried George in the voice of a madman and drove his fist straight to the man's face so that the little Russian was knocked clean off his feet and hit the floor with a thud.

Never have I seen any one rise so quickly as did that frail figure in the bathrobe. He seemed positively to bounce up like a rubber ball. For a moment he stood crouched in the doorway like a wild animal about to spring, and then as suddenly he stepped back and vanished down the corridor.

"Hold me up, Jim, I'm sick," said George in a strangely sobered voice. "Get me to bed, won't you?"

"It would serve you right if you were damn sick to hit a little fellow like that," I answered, but nevertheless I helped him to bed and we were soon fast asleep.

For the next day, and, indeed, for many days, the butler had a lump on his head the size of an egg, and yet never a word of complaint did we hear out of him, while George for his part seemed a trifle ashamed of his brutality and treated the man with more kindness for a time, but soon drifted back into his old ways again as I have yet to tell.

During the space of two whole months I had seen nothing of Bill Hardy. He never seemed to come back to his room any more, and it was not until my story had appeared in the "Everybody's Friend" that I saw him again.

"Good morning," said he, coming into the sitting-room and bringing a certain tingling freshness of the outer air in with him. "I see that you are a successful author these days."

"Yes," I answered a little condescendingly, "I have

a story in the 'Everybody's Friend' this month. Have you read it?"

"I read it," he responded, speaking very slowly and distinctly.

"Well, what do you think of it?" I asked.

"I think," said he, still speaking very slowly and looking me straight in the eyes the while, "that the thing is cheap, poorly written, and with no redeeming points about it whatsoever."

"What?" I cried, flushing with mortification and rage, for I knew that he spoke the truth and it was hard to bear.

"I'll go farther yet," Bill Hardy continued. "I think it is positively criminal for you to write such stuff, for you have in you the ability to rise to far better things."

I was slightly mollified in my anger at this, but I still felt the unpleasant sensations of inferiority and weakness that I had experienced the last time that I had seen him.

"And what right have you to judge me?" I asked. "Are you a literary man?"

"No," he answered, "nor neither was the editor who accepted that story. Come, now, I bet he told you to write that sort of thing, didn't he?"

"Yes," I answered grudgingly, "but the public wants it."

"And so you became the slave of the reading masses," said he.

"No, not at all," I cried. "A man has to have a start, you know. When I become a well-known author I'll turn to better things."

"No you won't," said Hardy.

"I won't? How do you know I won't?"

"Because," he answered simply, "nobody ever does."

You have sold the gifts that the gods have given you for gold, and the gods never forgive. Gradually your genius, your fire, will die away and in its place will spring up the money lust. Your ambitions then will be weighed on the golden scales, and you will become, like so many others, a maggot living off the rottenness and ignorance of your fellowman."

"And what are you," I cried, "to tell me this? What is your vocation in life? Have you an ambition?"

"Yes," he said, "I have the highest ambition."

"And what is that?" I sneered.

"My ambition," he answered, "is as big as the world, and bigger, for it embraces the world. I would see you, and all that breathe, happy and content."

"Oh, a reformer," I laughed, "and probably a Socialist, but what is your business, your means of livelihood?"

"Watching other people."

"So," I cried, "that's your fine ambition, is it, sitting around and watching other people work? It seems to me that that's a lazy man's job. Independently well off, I suppose, and living on your father's money, who may have had to go out and work for it. You're a fine one to preach about ambition, you are."

"Then you think it would be a better thing for me to go out and work?" he asked.

"Certainly," I answered.

"But why?"

"To make something of yourself, of course."

"In other words, you advise me," said he, "who have already enough clothes to wear and enough food to eat, to go out into the struggle of life, and, for purely selfish reasons, take the clothing and food from others who may need them. For every cent of money

I take in wantonness I may be depriving some one else of health, strength, and even life itself. If this is your ambition, I want none of it."

"Come, now," I said, "you'll be treading on the toes of our present civilization next, which, as you know, is founded on business."

"I wish," he cried, "that I could not only tread on the toes of civilization but that I could destroy it root and branch forever. The only hope for mankind is that all civilizations die. They must die when they fight nature as they do, and this, the worst of them all, will also go in its turn."

"The worst of them," I cried. "Why, you're mad, Hardy. Look at the wonderful inventions we have in this age, and the thousand and one labor-saving devices. Amusements are now limitless from the inventions that we have. This is a happy age, the happiest age."

"Happy?" he said. "Why, man, look about you. Do you see real happiness in the crowded theaters, in the gilded cafés, in all the glittering pageantry of city life? Happiness springs from self, and these people strive to forget self, and life, their life, by outside influences. In forgetting they reach oblivion and not happiness."

"Why do they seek to forget life? Because life is drudgery, a continual sameness that is worse than death itself. They cry out against the horrors of war, and yet, although the grim specter stalks through the ranks, it is not as terrible as this awful calm. Men live in excitement, healthy excitement, that taxes the nerves and the body alike, but when there is none of this they create the unhealthy excitement—café life and the like—and merely exist. Give me the splendor of one glo-

rious moment and then forever oblivion rather than the tedious years marching slowly on toward the grave.

"The rich man says that the poor man is happy because he knows nothing about the poor man. The poor man thinks that the rich man is happy because he knows nothing at all about the rich man.

" 'I am unhappy,' says the rich man. 'I have wasted my life acquiring riches, for evidently poverty and ignorance go hand and hand with happiness.'

" 'I am unhappy,' says the poor man, 'because I am poor. I will sell twenty years of my useless life for riches and then I will be happy, too.'

"Both are wrong, for, as I have said, happiness springs from self and from no outside unnatural influences such as wealth or grinding poverty bring. By self I mean a strong brain in a strong body which are, indeed, hard to keep in the business world. The body becomes weak from want of exercise and the brain cramped and narrow from dwelling on that one tedious refrain—gold, gold, gold.

"Art and literature are discouraged in these degenerate days because men and women cannot spare the time from squinting at their money bags, and, if they can, they would rather paralyze their brains at some musical comedy and forget."

"But how about the inventions," I broke in at last, "that augment the pleasures of the people, like automobiles, etc.? Surely they do good and create happiness."

"No," said he. "Each one of these inventions is against Nature and in consequence Nature takes her toll from the human race by accidents, sudden deaths, and the like.

"A man invents a bicycle and soon all mankind is

riding about, developing their legs at the cost of their back, shoulders, and chest. For a while they consider themselves happy but that soon wears off and they begin to whine for something new.

"Next comes the automobile, the favored toy of the few, and the rich men cry, 'now at last we will be happy,' while the many stand about with envious looks, or else scatter nails and glass on the roads. Automobiles are directly against the plans of Nature, who arranged that we should have muscles to use and legs to travel on, and so, in consequence, she rebels every now and then with the result that the pampered few become fewer.

"The flying machine is the next on the list to affront dear old mother Nature, for, if she intended that men should fly, she would, of course, provide wings. She has already shown her anger at this new invention of man's on many occasions.

"But what I am driving at is this, that if we didn't know that there were such things as bicycles, automobiles, and flying machines we'd be just as happy and, what's more, healthier and far safer.

"Therefore I say again, why the bicycles, automobiles and flying machines?"

## CHAPTER XIV

When Hardy finally left me I knew that I hadn't had the best of the argument, and, consequently, I felt so irritated and peevish over it that I heartily wished that I would never see the man again. As it proved, I was not to see him again until many months had passed, but that remains still to be told.

As time went on I continued to write short stories for the "Everybody's Friend," and to receive a check for each from Jennings. Gradually I began to branch out and write for other periodicals, and it was not long before I started to work on my first popular novel that later so pleased the reading public that it became one of the best sellers of the year.

Money and fame began to pour into me from a hundred different sources, and there came a time when I was so blinded by my success that I really believed I was creating the indestructible, and building a seat for myself among the immortals, but now, thank God, the bandage of conceit has fallen from my eyes, and I can read my earlier books with all their petty weaknesses laid bare before me. When I think of the years that I have wasted—but no matter, I have to tell of other things.

Naturally it took some time for me to become famous, and in the meanwhile many events happened that changed my mode of life considerably. For several months after my talk with Hardy it was my custom to work during the day and go out with Noman and Wilmot at night. We haunted the theaters and cafés

until all the ushers and waiters knew us by sight, and would welcome us with smiles as we entered.

All this time George was becoming daily more and more irritable, and often, if I happened to breakfast with him, I felt sorely tempted to punch his head soundly, and then leave the apartment forever. In fact, my own temper was growing none too good, and my nerves were in such a condition that a sudden noise, the slamming of a door or the like, would cause me unwarranted irritation.

Our condition, of course, was caused from the late hours we kept, and by the many dissipations in which we steeped ourselves. There came a time when George would get sudden pains about the heart that would turn his face livid on the instant and bring out big drops of sweat on his forehead. Finally he consulted a doctor, with much inward fear and trembling, and came home that night with a great grief written in his eyes.

"It's all up, Jim," he cried, dropping heavily into a chair. "The doc says my heart is all to the bad."

"Tell me about it," I said.

"There's nothing much to tell," said George with a groan, "only he tested it, and told me to cut out excitement of all kinds and to live the simple life indefinitely. I naturally kicked at that, and what do you think he said?"

"What?" I asked.

"That I'd drop off like that if I didn't," and he snapped his fingers emphatically, while his face grew deathly white at the mere thought.

"Imagine it, Jim," he continued, "to be sitting at a table, eating, drinking and laughing, and then at the next moment to be snuffed out like a candle, a dead thing with your head on the white cloth among the



bottles, while the people are leaving, leaving with a last glance of curiosity and horror. It's terrible, Jim!"

For many months after this Noman and I went out alone, leaving George beside the fireplace with an opened book upon his knee, which he was pretending to read, while in reality his thoughts were following us in our midnight hunt for pleasure. Finally, however, he fell before his temptations.

Noman had a habit of asking him to go with us. "Just to test his strength of will," he'd whisper to me, and then putting his hand on Wilmot's shoulder, "Come along, George, and be a good fellow to-night," whereupon George would shake his head wearily, while a kind of hunted look would steal up into his eyes.

On the night when Wilmot finally surrendered he looked in far better health than I had seen him in many a day, and therefore his relapse into his old ways was a surprise and shock to me.

Noman had just asked him to go with us, and had added that Edna Courtney would be at Maxim's that night. At the girl's name George started in his chair and looked up into Noman's handsome, flushed face with something near akin to hatred peering out of his eyes.

"You've got me, damn you, you've got me," he shouted hoarsely, and jumping to his feet he hurried from the room, returning in a few moments with his overcoat on his arm ready for the street.

"You're not going with us, George?" I cried in astonishment.

"I am," said he, looking straight at Noman.

"But how about the doctor's orders?" I asked.

"Oh, damn the doctor!" said George. "He'd make

a medicine chest of a fellow if he could. He was trying to scare me up, that's all, but I won't stand for it, and you can bet on that. I'm not a kid to be told what I can do and what I can't do. I'm a sport and I'll take a chance."

That night Noman and I brought him back to the apartment as drunk as a lord singing "Onward, Christian Soldiers" and cursing the doctor in the same breath.

From that time until the day of his death was one long period of intoxication for Wilmot. He became an habitual drunkard, coming home from the bank in the afternoon much the worse for liquor and then drinking himself into a beastly state of insensibility before the morning rose gray in the heavens. It was a horrible thing to see a man on the very brink of the grave, as he was, staggering along the streets with nothing but vile thoughts in his head and foul words on his tongue. When I was sober the man sickened me, and I sought every excuse to be rid of him, but at that period of my life, it must be owned, that I, too, was sober very little of the time.

The little Russian led a very dog's life. It was no unusual thing now for George to cuff him at the slightest provocation, and as the butler never complained, but took it all with a kind of dull submission, Wilmot, who was naturally a bully at heart, took every possible opportunity to abuse and maltreat him.

When I was about, unless I was drunk and didn't care, I would try to protect the little man as much as possible, but it must be owned that I felt very little sympathy for a creature of so little spirit as the Russian seemed to possess.

This brings me up to the night of October 15, when the true character of the butler was brought to light for the first time.

It was a very cold windy night for October, with a kind of sleet beating against the window-panes, like the sound of sand thrown against glass. Every now and then the wind would howl around the building with a series of long-drawn sobbing wails that would end in a veritable shriek of human agony.

All and all it was a night when it is pleasant to sit before the open fire, well fed and comfortable, and think of the hungry houseless ones that roam the streets, and then rejoice selfishly in our own good fortune.

After dinner Wilmot and I adjourned to the sitting-room, followed by the butler with the decanter of wine. When the Russian had filled our glasses George found a piece of cork floating on the top of his, and so, quite as a matter of course, he struck the butler a resounding blow with his open hand on the side of the face, so that the man reeled on his feet, and his cheek turned to crimson on the instant.

As the butler made his way to the door I saw that his whole slight frame was shaking as from heavy sobbing, and, on a sudden impulse, I followed him out into the hall and laid my hand on his shoulder. I spun him around so that I could look into his face, and what I saw took the words out of my mouth on the instant and left me speechless from wonderment.

The man was not sobbing, as I had supposed, but was laughing heartily, silently, so that his sides shook from it, and his lips were drawn back from his teeth in a glittering grimace.

For a moment he stood thus, and then he disengaged himself from my nerveless fingers and, still shaking all over with silent laughter, vanished down the corridor, leaving me staring stupidly after him.

## CHAPTER XV

When I returned to the sitting-room George was sitting in the Morris chair before the fire playing with the stem of his wine glass with listless fingers.

"Did you soothe his outraged feelings?" he asked with a faint sneer.

"No," I answered, as I drew up my chair beside him. "It wasn't necessary."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that the man was laughing, not crying," I retorted curtly.

"Laughing?" cried George in sudden anger. "I'll teach him to laugh on the other side of his face before I'm through with him," and he rose threateningly to his feet.

"Hold on," I said, laying a restraining hand on his arm. "We've had enough of your bullying, George. I tell you the man is uncanny and gets on my nerves. If you keep this kind of thing up he may go off his head sometime and fix you good and plenty. I don't think he's quite right in the head as it is."

"Why, Ivan wouldn't hurt a fly," cried George with a loud laugh. "He hasn't got the nerve of a sick cat, and besides that he thinks the world of me."

"Maybe you're right," said I, "but let the man alone to-night at least."

"I'll fix him in the morning then," said George reluctantly, sinking back into his chair. "Laugh at me, will he?" and his voice subsided into indistinct mutterings.

Just at this moment there came a tapping on the outside door, a steady monotonous tapping, as though some one were trying to make very little noise about it.

"Well, what do you know about that?" cried George, springing to his feet. "Why in hell don't they ring the bell, whoever it is?" and he strode to the door.

In a moment more he reappeared with the tall figure of Noman close at his heels, enveloped in a rain-coat from head to foot. There was an unusual air of excitement about the man as he strode in, dripping water at every step. For once his face lacked its vivid coloring, and was almost pale, while his black eyes were fixed on the two glasses of wine with an anxious look.

"Throw that wine in the fire," were his first words, and so peremptory was the tone of his voice that scarcely had he ceased to speak before I had obeyed him quite unconsciously.

"Now, George," said he, turning to Wilmot, "see if you can find your latch-key."

George fumbled in his pocket for a moment, with a look of dumb amazement on his bloated face. "It's not here," he said. "It's probably in my other clothes. I changed before dinner," and Wilmot rose to his feet, still with an amazed expression, and went back into his bedroom.

In a few moments he returned, shaking his head. "It's not there either," he said simply. "I must have lost it."

Noman laughed at this, a quick, nervous laugh. "Did you, or did you not say at the breakfast table that you intended staying in to-night?"

"I did," cried George, after a moment's pause; "but why should——"

"Oh," broke in Noman with a kind of feverish im-

patience, "be quiet for a moment, and listen to me, will you?"

Wilmot nodded his head. "All right," said he, "go ahead," and then Noman told his story, while his eyes flashed from one to the other of us like summer lightning.

"I overheard a conversation this afternoon between three men," he began. "No matter how I heard it, or where I heard it, but suffice it to say that one of these men was your patient butler, Ivan Tergenoff.

"I listened carefully," he continued, "and overheard a very pretty plan decided upon to rifle this apartment on this very night. Ivan described the place to the others thoroughly. He told them where the silver is kept and where money and other valuables could be found, and then he gave one of them the latch-key, which he said he had taken out of your pocket. He told them to call about twelve o'clock, for he promised that at that time his masters, meaning you and Jim, would be out of the way.

"His two companions started at this, and the taller one cried out, 'We don't want any rough work,' meaning by that that he didn't want you murdered in your beds.

" 'Oh, no,' said Ivan, and I can still see the grin on the man's face as he said it. 'I will give them a sleeping draught in their wine, that is all.'

"Soon after they parted, each going his separate way, and I followed Ivan Tergenoff. At Thirty-third Street, while pulling out his pocket handkerchief, he dropped a little memorandum book, unnoticed, which I promptly picked up and later read at my leisure. I have it with me now," and he drew it out and placed it on the arm of his chair.

Throughout this recital George had been restlessly moving in his chair. "Do you mean to say," he cried at last, "that my butler, Ivan Tergenoff, is going to rob me? Why it's ridiculous, and I won't believe it. I've had him for three years now, and he's always been trustworthy. You must have made a mistake, Noman."

"It's you that have made the mistake," said Noman quietly. "I never said that Tergenoff was going to rob you."

"But didn't I hear you with my own ears say that he was conspiring with two men to rifle the apartment?"

"Yes," answered Noman, "that's true enough."

"Well that means that he's going to rob, doesn't it?" cried George in exasperation.

"No," answered Noman, speaking very slowly and distinctly. "He is not going to rob you, for Ivan Tergenoff is not a thief, but he is going to murder you, for Ivan Tergenoff is a murderer."

That was too much for me, and I burst out into an unrestrained laugh. "That little cringing man," I cried, "a murderer? Why, Noman, you're crazy."

"Look at what this little cringing man has written," said he, and he opened the little memorandum book and started to read.

"This is the diary of Ivan Tergenoff, nicknamed 'The Silent,'" Noman began, 'started on the first day of his taking service with his new master, George Wil-mot.

"Master? I thought that I had stricken that name from my vocabulary forever, and that here, in this so-called land of the free, I would be the equal of all men, and yet it is not so.

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"'Master? The very title means death to him that bears it, for it is written that I, Ivan Tergenoff, shall have no masters. Ten have passed away with the fear of me looking out of their eyes, and yet the task goes on and on, and is never finished.

"'They call me an anarchist, and they are right, although little guessing it, for I am in revolt at all times, and against all things. The world is an evil thing in my eyes, and I would destroy the world. The stars in the heavens irritate me, because they are so high above me, so peaceful and at rest. I would pluck them out of the sky, one by one, and trample them under foot, for in my burning brain God himself, because he is omnipotent and all powerful, is hateful to me. In both my waking and sleeping hours the voice whispers in my ear the same monotonous refrain, "kill, kill, kill," and for me there is no rest.

"'If the whole universe was smoldering in ashes, and I alone, of all mankind, still lived, I would kill myself with a glad heart and a willing hand, for I hate myself, my body, my mind, almost as much as I hate these others.'"

Noman stopped reading for a moment, while he turned the pages of the diary, and I saw George wiping his perspiring forehead with his pocket handkerchief, while he muttered several times in a low voice, quite unconsciously, "Good God, good God, good God!"

"Now we come to the interesting part," said Noman coolly, and he commenced to read again:

"'As the months go by I see that my new master is like those that I have had before, selfish, thoughtless and domineering. This can mean but the one thing, death.'"

Again Noman turned over the pages, and I noticed that George's face was now livid in the firelight.

"I have another master," continued Noman. "He comes from the country, and is as yet kind and considerate, but soon he will change, and then I will sharpen my knife for them both.

"Wilmot curses at me continually now, and gradually I feel the anticipation of a great joy stealing over me, my one joy in life, the joy of killing. When the brain is cold the hand is unwilling, and the senses revolt before the sight and smell of blood, but when the brain is on fire with hate, then to drive the sharp knife into the soft yielding flesh is a pleasure so acute, so overpowering that we are raised above ourselves even to the level of the brute beasts. Humanity is the great weakness of man. Who should know this better than Ivan Tergenoff?"

Noman paused to clear his throat, but continued reading again almost immediately.

"At last my master has struck me, and at that full in the face. I opened the door for him, and he struck me, while the new master stood by laughing. Then the wild beast rose in me, and I was about to spring at his throat when I remembered. Ivan Tergenoff, you are a fool. Since that night Wilmot has treated me well, I might almost say kindly, and if I had not a very good memory my anger might have died in my breast, but I say to myself, 'You have frightened him, Tergenoff, you have frightened him, but wait and we will see.'"

"Now," said Noman, "we come to the last of the diary, which was probably written this morning," and he recommenced reading again.

"The time has come at last, and I am both ready

and willing, nay more than willing. My body is bruised and my heart burns within me with a great hate.

“For every blow that Wilmot gives me, and they are many, I laugh to myself and say, ‘wait a little and we shall see, my master. For this I shall tie you to your bed and torture you to death. Little did you think that for this blow across the face I would dig out both your eyes with the sharp point of my knife, or that for these ugly curses I would slice your tongue to ribbons in your throat, but wait a little, master, wait a little.’”

“How happy I am that I have waited these cruel months, for the pleasure before me to-night is so intense that it would make up for a whole life-time of suffering. I often wake in the night laughing heartily, and I know that I have dreamed about it. If he strikes me again I pray that I have enough strength to conquer my mirth and not break out laughing into his very face, or he may suspect.

“The time has come, the knife is ready, the sleeping draughts prepared in the wine, and all is in readiness. When Morton and Williams use the latch-key to-night they will have nothing to fear, for both masters will be sleeping fast enough, and I, the faithful butler, will be gone.

“Ivan Tergenoff is no thief, for he is a murderer,” and here ended this strange diary.

For many minutes George and I interchanged vacant glances, and said never a word. The sudden surprise of the whole thing had paralyzed our reasoning powers and our tongues as well. We were like men turned to stone.

“Well, I’ll be damned,” muttered George feebly; “it

was barely an hour ago that I struck him across the face. I might just as well have cuffed a rattlesnake," and his features began to pucker up like a child's on the point of tears.

"Come," I cried, "we've got to take precautions as it is. When will his accomplices be here, Noman?"

"They agreed on twelve o'clock," said he.

"Twelve o'clock," I repeated, pulling out my watch with rather an unsteady hand. "Then we've got three hours before us. It's barely nine now. One of us had better go for the police."

"I'll do that," cried George with such sudden readiness that I would have laughed at any other time.

"No, you won't," said Noman, "because we need you here, and besides I attended to the affair myself. I went to the nearest police station right after I heard the scheme and had picked up Terzenoff's diary. We'll have three burly policemen here by eleven o'clock."

"But why didn't you ring the bell just now?" asked George, with a silly, stupid stare.

"Why?" cried Noman with a laugh, "because I didn't want to let Ivan Terzenoff know that I was here, that's why. He didn't bargain on murdering three, and he might have lost his nerve and changed his plans. We want to trap the whole three of them."

"I thought that you were through dinner, and probably in the sitting-room, and, if this were the case, the butler in all probability would be back in the kitchen or pantry, so I tapped lightly on the door, thinking that you might hear it and open it, which proved to be so. I was lucky enough to arrive before you had tasted the wine, or I might have had a couple of dead men on my hands."

"It seems to me," muttered George, "that you took a mighty long chance on our lives. Suppose we had started drinking at dinner, as we usually do, why we'd be lying here on the carpet with our throats cut now," and he began to tremble all over at the very thought, till it was pitiful to watch him.

"That's a fine way to thank a friend who has just saved your life," I started angrily, but Noman broke in hurriedly:

"Come, come, no quarreling," said he, "for we have other things to 'tend to. Ivan Tergenoff is liable to be back here any moment now, knife and all, and when he sees that you are not stupefied from the wine, and that I am here, there is sure to be trouble. We'd better go back, the three of us, and take him by surprise."

"But that's too dangerous," whined Wilmot. "Let's wait until the police come."

"And get our throats cut by that little Russian maniac in there? Not on your life. Come on, we're three to one, and he not much bigger than a child," and he started for the doorway, kicking off his low shoes as he went.

We followed his example, and the whole three of us, in stocking feet, were soon tiptoeing down the corridor, George bringing up the rear in a reluctant fashion, and seizing my arms in a vise-like grip as we passed an especially dark corner where the shadows played.

Thus, in a silent procession, we crept down the hallway, until we reached the butler's pantry, and there we came to a halt. Through a crack in the swinging door we could see the glimmering of the electric light (the hall was in practical darkness where we stood).

and hear a strange insistent buzzing noise, rising and falling, like the sounds that a beetle makes while flying around a candle.

"He's in there," Noman whispered, and all at once I felt that my throat was dry and sticky, and that my heart was beating too fast and driving all the blood up into my head.

"What's that noise?" whispered George in a quavering tone. "It gets on my nerves horribly. I think we'd really better wait until the police come," and he started tiptoeing up the corridor again.

"Let him go," said Noman, "for he'd only be in our way anyhow," and he began to push open the door silently, and about an inch at a time.

Soon, through the widening crack, we could catch a glimpse of the interior, and what I saw then came to haunt my pillow on many a sleepless night.

Ivan Tergenoff was sitting barely six feet from us, with his back to the door, all hunched over in his chair. On the table before him was a little grindstone, the handle of which he turned with his left hand, while in his right he held a long, gleaming knife that flashed little blue sparks in a steady stream.

Now and again he would stop his work to put the point of the weapon on his thumb, and then, evidently dissatisfied with the feel of it, would commence all over again.

There was something so horrible in his methodical preparations for murder that I felt the hair rising up on my head in little furrows and the sweat running down into my eyes. If he had been cursing madly or even foaming at the mouth with rage I feel convinced that I would have felt no fear at all, but he seemed so matter of fact about it, as though he were going to

carve a steak, or cut the wing from a turkey, that it seemed unnatural and past belief that he contemplated a dual murder on that very night. What we cannot comprehend is ever the more terrible.

How long we stood there peering at him I do not know, but, to me at least, it seemed like an eternity. Suddenly I felt Noman's hand on my arm and heard his voice speaking to me.

"Now when I count three," he whispered, "we'll get him. You take his hands and I'll grab him by the feet. Are you ready?"

"Yes," I whispered.

"All right. Push open the door a little. That's it. One, two, three!" and we sprang on the little hunched-up figure bending over the grindstone.

Tergenoff, chair and all, rolled on the floor, while the knife flew out of his hand and fell with a clatter in the far corner of the room.

Noman and I were both on top of the man in an instant and pinned him down beneath our weight, so that it seemed as though the struggle was all over before it had really begun, but very soon we discovered that this was not the case.

Although we were both big powerful men, and had the advantage of the sudden attack on our side, yet I never experienced a livelier five minutes than this little frail fiend gave us. Never a word he spoke from first to last, but fought with such a fury of desperation, using both nails and teeth to good advantage, that we carried the marks of the combat for many days afterward.

Finally I managed to get a strangle hold about his throat that brought his teeth with a sharp snap out of my shoulder, where they had been fixed, while Noman

had at last conquered his writhing legs, and sat on them, holding them motionless by the sheer weight of his body. Little by little I tightened my hold about his neck, until the veins stood out big and black on the man's forehead, and he was gasping for breath like a fish out of water.

Then as suddenly as he had started to struggle he stopped entirely and lay beneath our hands like a senseless body, listless and loose-jointed, while his burning eyes stared up into mine, with a look in their depths that was not a pleasant thing to see.

"So you've had enough, eh?" cried Noman in an exultant tone. "How do you feel now, Ivan Ter-genoff?"

The Russian paid not the slightest attention to him, but continued to gaze up at me with a horrible glassy stare.

"Well, what shall we do with him?" said Noman at length. "We can't hold him here until the police come. The position is too trying on a man's back. What do you say if we put him in the bathroom and lock the door? He can't get out of there, can he?"

"Not unless he wants to take a jump out of the window and fall fifty feet to the pavement," I answered.

"Then let's carry him in, you at the head and I at the feet. Now both together. That's it," and we lifted him and carried him out into the hallway, and down it till we reached the door of the bathroom, and here we stopped. All this time Ter-genoff had been lying in our arms motionless and still staring up into my face with his burning, bloodshot eyes.

It was an unnatural, and therefore an unhealthy thing, to see such a fiery hatred incased in such a frail



body, and the very feel of him, as I held him under the armpits, was repulsive to me, and so it was with a great sigh of relief that we dropped him on the floor of the bathroom and closed the door.

"Well, I'm glad that's over," cried Noman, as he turned the key in the lock. "Faugh, the man disgusts me! I'd as soon carry a dead body into the morgue as to so much as touch him again."

"He affects me the same way," I answered. "All the way from the pantry to the bathroom door I had to fight with myself to keep on holding him. There's something uncanny in his eyes."

"I think it would go rather badly for you and George," said Noman grimly, "if he should make a clean getaway from jail, let us say. Men of that type never forgive, but let's get back to the sitting-room and find Wilmot."

## CHAPTER XVI

There was no George in the brightly lighted sitting-room when we returned, still panting from our struggle with the little Russian, nor was he in the dining-room hiding in the gloom.

"Where do you suppose he's gone?" I asked Norman. "You don't think he's left the place altogether, do you?"

"It's hard to say," said he. "The man was nearly frightened to death. Let's try his bedroom, though; he might be there."

Sure enough, when we turned the door-knob we found that the door was locked on the inside, and it was not until we had knocked several times that George spoke at last in a frightened whisper.

"Who's there?" said he, and then not waiting for a response he continued in a louder tone: "Tell me, tell me, I say, or I'll call for help. I've got my head out of the window now," and we heard the window sash go up with a bang.

"It's only Jim and Dick, you fool," cried Norman impatiently. "Open up, will you?"

At that we heard the window close again and hesitating footsteps inside moving cautiously about.

"Is that you, Norman?" asked George, and we heard his breath whistling through the key-hole.

"Yes, of course, but open the door, will you?"

"But where is Terzenoff?" said Wilmot, still in a frightened whisper.

"We've got him locked in the bathroom," I shouted. "It's all right. Come on out."

Then there came a long-drawn sigh of relief from Wilmot, and the key slowly turned in the lock. "It's my nerves," said he, standing in the doorway, with a face the color of chalk. "They've gone completely back on me. Now if it wasn't for that——"

"That's all right," broke in Noman. "Don't bother to explain. We know you'd have been as brave as a lion if you'd been built that way. But come on out, for the excitement isn't all over; we've got two thieves yet to deal with."

Reluctantly George drew up his chair beside the fire. "I'm afraid all this is bad for my heart," he said feebly, and then he lapsed into silence, while he stared into the glowing coals with a troubled look in his eyes.

For some time, perhaps a half hour, not a word was spoken, but we sat silently, each engrossed in his own thoughts, and counting the seconds as they slid slowly by. Every now and then Noman would pull out his watch and glance at it with an impatient frown.

"It's time for the police to show up," he said at last, and then he rose to his feet and began to pace the room hurriedly.

"Suppose they shouldn't come at all?" cried George with a new tone of terror in his voice. "They might have misunderstood the time, they might have mistaken the house, they might——"

"Well," broke in Noman almost roughly, "what of it?"

"What are we going to do then?" cried George in almost a shriek.

"What are we going to do?" said Noman, wheeling around on his heel and facing Wilmot. "Why we are

going to catch the thieves ourselves, that's what we are going to do."

"You're crazy, Noman," I broke in; "you're absolutely mad. Why, there isn't a gun in the house. I generally have my nerves with me, but this is rank foolishness. Let me call up Police Headquarters on the phone and make sure that they're coming."

"Not in this place," answered Noman coolly.

"Why not?" I cried. "There's a phone right out in the hall."

"Tergenoff didn't want to be disturbed to-night," said Noman quietly, "and therefore he cut the wires. I noticed that as I carried him into the bathroom."

"Let me go out and find some one then," cried George, "before it's too late. There's always a policeman standing on the corner. We'll be murdered if I don't. We haven't a thing to defend ourselves with."

"You are wrong," said Noman quite simply, and he threw back his head and straightened to his full height, so that he towered over us, while the red blood surged to his face and his great black eyes sparkled dangerously in the fire-light.

"You are wrong," he repeated slowly, "for I at least have my hands," and he held them out before him. "They are strong hands," he finished quietly.

Then a strange thing happened, for in a moment all the fears that had been wreathing about my heart and paralyzing it fled on the instant, and I felt, without knowing why, a perfect security and a feeling that I was on the stronger side, the safer side, in that which was about to happen.

Even George, who, up to this, had been nervously twitching his arms and legs about, stopped on a sud-

den and looked up into Noman's face with the tranquil eyes of a trustful child.

Just at this moment there came a sharp ring on the bell, and Noman hurried out in the hall, reappearing again in a moment or so with three huge policemen at his heels.

Those were the days of the fat policemen, when New York City was guarded by the heavy and slow footed. Often of a night, while coming home slightly intoxicated, I have laughed until my sides ached at these ungainly custodians of the peace. They would waddle along two or three at a time, like so many ducks, one behind the other, giving a nod or a few spoken words to the women of the street that flitted by like shadows, or a sound tapping with their night-sticks on the feet of some sleeping tramp or drunkard in the doorways, but it was ever a helping hand they extended to young gentlemen, like myself, returning from an evening of pleasure. They symbolized the law perfectly, ponderous and unwieldy, grinding down the low still lower beneath their feet, and blinded by the false radiance of class distinction.

Well, as I have said, these three fat policemen followed Noman into the room, all puffing heavily from their climb up the stairs.

"You're late, men," said Noman curtly. "We'd about given you up. The crooks will be here any moment now."

The three officers of law and order interchanged looks of embarrassment at this. "Sure, Mister Noman," said one of them at last in a wheezing, asthmatic tone, "we've been after a pickpocket since leaving the stationhouse, and had a long chase of it."

"And that's the truth," said another. "A little red-

headed man, sir, comes running full tilt into us near Forty-second Street. A great bleeding cut he had over one eye, and a watch chain hanging down in front, with niver a sign of a watch to it.

"'I'm robbed,' says he, and then pointing up the street at a guy what's running, 'That's the man,' he cries, and we runs after him."

"And you traced him to, let us say, Jim Sullivan's saloon," broke in Noman, "and here you had a few drinks with the barkeeper in duty bound, not because you wanted to, but just because you wished to get a clue from him, and meanwhile the thief slipped out through a side door and got clean away. Is that it?"

"Sure," said the first policeman with a sickly grin; "you could have told it no better, sir, if you seen it with your own eyes. That was the way of it, wasn't it, Tim?"

"You're right," said the second policeman solemnly; "that was the way of it sure enough."

The third policeman, and the fattest, said nothing at all, but sat blowing his cheeks out like toy balloons at every breath, while he rubbed his scarlet, perspiring face with the wet, greasy sleeve of his coat, as in mute testimony of his zeal in serving the city.

"Come, come," said Noman, "it's nearly twelve o'clock. We've got one of the criminals locked up in the bathroom safe enough, but the other two will be here any moment now. We will put out the electric lights and make ready for our guests.

"You, McCarty and Hogan, get behind the curtain there, if it's big enough, and you, Flint, in the doorway, so. I'll stand by the button and flash the lights on when they're fairly in. That's right, George, go into your bedroom if you want to. We don't need

you. Stand beside me, Jim. Now we're ready for them."

There was something so forceful in the tone of Noman's voice that we did what he said quite unconsciously, and soon we were all in our positions and the room in darkness.

"Now," said Noman, and his voice grated on my nerves like the squeaking of a rusty hinge, "get your guns out, men. Hark, what's that?"

The silence was so intense at that moment that I could fairly hear my heart beating against my ribs, seemingly faster and faster each second, and I felt from the excitement of it that the palms of my hands were dripping wet.

Suddenly I heard quite distinctly, as I strained my ears for every sound, a slight metallic noise, as of metal rubbing very gently against metal, then a click as the lock turned in the outside door, and finally muffled footsteps creeping along the hallway.

As I stared at the doorway intently I saw two dark figures framed in it for an instant against the background of feeble lamp light in the corridor.

One step, two steps, three steps they made into the room, and then Noman touched the button, and the whole place was lit up with a bright light. Then there came a choking cry from the taller of the two thieves, and he reeled back against the wall, with his hand up before his eyes, but the other stood like a rock, and without so much as the quiver of an eyelid, looked into the barrels of the three weapons pointing at him.

As I gazed at this indignant figure looking death in the eyes, a sudden great surprise took hold of me, so that I cried aloud in astonishment, for the man that stood before me was none other than the Merry Old

Gentleman of my train misadventure, only now, instead of being clothed in neat black broadcloth, he was dressed in a ragged old suit of rough texture. There were changes in his face as well. It had grown thinner and sterner looking, although the eyes still twinkled with a little of the devil in their depths.

"This is the night of my revenge," I said to myself. "Now if the bogus clergyman were only here," and my eyes turned to the frail figure that still leaned back against the wall. He had dropped his arms at his sides and his face was ghastly white in the light, like a corpse, while his lips moved, voicing unintelligible sounds.

Then I experienced another thrill, for it was none other than the gambling minister himself, now grown shabby, and so thin that the hollows in his cheeks were like caverns, and the blue veins stood out like whipcords through his white skin.

This was indeed the night of my triumph, and yet I could not seem to enjoy the scene before me as I had hoped to do. The fearlessness in the eyes of the Merry Old Gentleman, and also the horror and misery depicted in the clergyman's somehow appealed to me strangely.

I felt that these men were not getting a square deal, and that they had never had a square deal, and it hurt me. It hurt me to see the gigantic red-faced Hogan stick the barrel of his gun into the clergyman's ribs with unnecessary violence, and tell him to stick his hands up, or, by God, he'd blow so many holes in him that he'd look like a sieve, while his prisoner, evidently quite out of his head, kept repeating the Lord's Prayer in a whisper, wearily, monotonously.

It hurt me to see the Merry Old Gentleman get very



red in the face on a sudden, and then spring straight at Hogan's throat, and then to see him a moment later lying unconscious from the blow of a policeman's club with the blood oozing out through his white hair and sinking into the carpet.

It hurt me to see them putting the handcuffs on the thin wrists of the clergyman and to see the look on his face as they did it.

All these things hurt me exceedingly, and yet it was incomprehensible to me why they should hurt me.

Here were two men who had flattered me, who had fooled me, who had gotten me drunk, and had afterward robbed me, and here was I, when the chance had offered itself to put these men in jail to get my lawful revenge, actually sorry for them. "What a fool I am," I told myself, and yet I could not shake the feeling off.

Suddenly Noman's voice brought me out of my reverie. "Come on," he cried quite cheerily, "now we'll get the other one," and he started down the passageway, followed by two of the policemen and myself.

When we reached the bathroom the two officers stood ready with their clubs, while Noman slowly opened the door. What we saw turned me speechless from amazement. The room was empty. Ivan Ter-genoff had vanished.

"Sure," said Hogan at last with a stupid stare, "there's no man here, at all, at all."

"But there was," I cried wildly, "for I threw him in here with my own hands. He's jumped out of the window, that's it. We'll find him down on the pavement smashed to a jelly."

Noman ran to the window, and, throwing it open wide, stuck his head out.

"I can see the whole yard as plain as though it were daylight," said he. "He's not there," and then, "I'll be damned," he shouted, and wheeled around facing us.

"What is it?" I asked. "Do you see him?"

He never answered my question, but looking me all over said, "Have you a head on your shoulders or a pumpkin? Why didn't you have a staircase constructed on the outside of the building for the convenience of the thieves or murderers that may be visiting?"

"What do you mean?" I asked angrily.

"Merely," said Noman, "that there's a fire-escape running down from the window next to this, George's room, and it's barely a six-foot jump."

I rushed forward at this, and, sure enough, there was a fire-escape outside Wilmot's window, and it was merely child's play for a light, active man to make the leap and descend to the yard. It was very evident that Tergenoff had gone that way.

"These amachure detectives is Hell," sneered Officer Flint as he waddled down the hallway.

## CHAPTER XVII

When I returned to the sitting-room the three policemen were leaving with the prisoners in their midst.

I was strangely and unaccountably affected by the sight. I believe at that moment if I could have stricken off their fetters and told them to go free, I would have done it without the slightest hesitation.

It seemed to me almost like a sacrilege to see the handcuffs on the thin white wrists of the clergyman, and the drooping senseless figure of the Merry Old Gentleman filled me with a great pity.

Hogan had one huge corded fist on the frail old man's collar, and was pushing him on before him with what I considered unnecessary violence, while he shouted in a gruff tone the while, "Be lively, you, be lively, or I'll give yer a taste of me club."

Bringing up the rear were the two other officers carrying the motionless body of the Merry Old Gentleman between them with as little tenderness as if it had been a log of wood instead of a human being like themselves. It was a scene that still appears vividly before me, even as I write these words.

At last the party descended the stairs and gained the street. Already, on looking out of the window, I could see a large crowd of the curious, who, like vultures, had smelt the blood from afar, and come to revel in the unhealthy excitement.

They had surrounded the patrol wagon that stood by the curb, and it was only after many threats and some difficulty that the policemen were able to push

their way through with their two prisoners. In a moment more the wagon rolled off, leaving the crowd still gaping at the house with eager, expectant eyes and dull, stupid faces.

I pulled down the shade in some irritation, and, turning about, came face to face with George, who had at last come out of his bedroom.

"Did they capture them all?" he cried in exultation, grinning from ear to ear. "How about Tergenoff? Did he go quietly?" and he began to rub his hands together in a pleased way.

"No," I answered roughly, for the man's manner provoked me; "they didn't get them all."

"What?" said he, and his face turned deathly white on the instant.

"Tergenoff escaped," I told him. "He got out of the bathroom by the fire-escape, your fire-escape. He's probably many miles from here now, unless," I added with malice, "he's waiting around here somewhere to fix you."

Right after I had spoken I regretted my words, for Wilmot's face from a dead white turned to a veritable green shade, and with a gasping cry he threw up both hands and collapsed into a soft, senseless heap of humanity on the carpet before me.

It was more than an hour before Noman and I could bring him back to consciousness, and it was a full two weeks before he could leave his bed. The doctor shook his head when he saw him, and whispered in my ear that another such attack would finish him outright.

Naturally I felt some remorse for my hasty words, and I did all I could to atone for them, staying in the house constantly and waiting on Wilmot's every want. He was often very hard to put up with, querulous and

peevish like a sick child, and I had to humor him in all things.

One thing he insisted upon, and this was that he should never be left alone, not even for a minute. He lived in a constant fear of Tergenoff day and night, and it was in vain that we sought to pacify him, telling him that the man was glad to get off so easily and that he would never trouble us again.

"No," he would say, shaking his head wearily from side to side on my pillow, for he had insisted on moving to my room, where there was no fire-escape, "I feel convinced that some day he'll come back, and, oh, God, when he does!" and then he would break out into unrestrained childish weeping that was very pitiful to hear.

Gradually he recovered his strength, little by little, and soon he was able to go down to the bank again, accompanied by Noman and myself, for he refused positively to go out of the house alone. This brings me up to the 14th of November, the day set for the trial of the thieves.

Of course, George, Noman and I were summoned to appear against them, and what was our surprise, on mounting the witness stand, to see no other than Bill Hardy himself as attorney for the defense.

For a moment I was struck speechless from amazement. "Why, George," I whispered, "you never told me that he was a lawyer."

Wilmot was staring at Hardy with round starting eyes. "I didn't know it myself," he answered hoarsely. "He never told me."

Meanwhile the trial was going on. From the first, of course, there was absolutely no chance for the prisoners. They were guilty, caught red-handed, and

it was a waste of time even to try to defend the case.

Hardy must have realized this, for he made no attempt whatever to cross-examine the witnesses, Norman, George and myself, as we gave our testimony, but sat back listlessly in his seat, apparently paying little attention to anything that was going on about him. Every now and then however he would whisper something to the two prisoners that would cause their somber faces to light up on the instant with a strange joy.

The clergyman, as I will continue to call him, sat, for the most part, all bent over in his chair, with his large, timid eyes turning from one to another of his accusers, with a tired, appealing look in their depths.

"My God," came in a shaking whisper from George, "he's got eyes like my old dog Buster, that I found in the country," and he turned his back on the prisoners for the rest of the proceedings.

There was nothing timid or appealing about the face of the Merry Old Gentleman. On the contrary he looked fiercely at the witnesses, at the jury, and even at the people in the back of the crowded court room. His blue eyes were as hard looking as flint, and his square jaw was set and slightly protruding. He still wore a white bandage about his temples, and his gray hair bristled straight up on his head like that of an angry dog. When addressed he answered straight to the point, in the fewest possible words, and his clear metallic voice rang out like a challenge. Indeed he was an entirely changed man from the good-hearted old fellow who had taken me in so completely on the train.

As I have said, from the first there was no hope for the prisoners, and the judge, jury and lawyers knew

this only too well, and hurried the case along accordingly. At last Hardy rose slowly to his feet.

"With your permission, your Honor," he said, turning to the judge, "I will let my clients state their own case."

At this the prosecuting attorney made a motion as though he were about to speak, but then, evidently thinking better of it, smiled instead.

The judge nodded his head in assent and barely suppressed a yawn with a white hand. "Proceed," said he.

Hardy turned to the Merry Old Gentleman, whispering some indistinct words in his ear, and the latter rose slowly to his feet.

The Merry Old Gentleman was not a very tall man, in fact he was a rather short one, but there was something in the set of his square shoulders, something in his massive face and glittering eyes, that spoke of a great rugged primitive strength.

He swept the court room with a contemptuous look, and then began to speak, with his eyes fixed on Hardy's face, as though he would shut out the entire world beside, because this man alone could understand.

"I am not like these people," he began. "They are molded from civilization, while I am molded from nature.

"To me the greatest thing in life is dying, I would die well. To them the greatest thing in life is living, and yet they do not live well. I am a fighter, and I would like to fight to the end with my body against other bodies, and the modern world does not understand me.

"I could lead a forlorn hope or sack a town. In the first I would be a hero, in the second a butcher. The

pleasures of the flesh are pleasing to me next to battle. I would steep myself in dissipations in times of peace, to cast them aside like that," and he snapped his fingers, "for a taste of war.

"What I want I take, for with me there is more pleasure in the taking than the having. I became a robber because all men steal. I became a house-breaker because it is more dangerous than to become a broker.

"Civilization is abhorrent to me because it destroys romance, heroics, and levels everything to the commonplace. If God were commonplace he wouldn't be God; if I were commonplace, I wouldn't be a house-breaker.

"I am a hero, and I was born in an age of bearded women. What is there left for a man but death? I live but to die, and to die well. Who can tell, it may come yet," and he broke off abruptly and sat down very red in the face.

Then there came a roar of laughter from those in the back of the court room, and even the jurors themselves were grinning from ear to ear, while the judge rapped for order with a twitching face.

When the sounds of merriment finally died away, the other prisoner rose to his feet and gazed about him with a timid, frightened look, but soon his eyes came back to Hardy's face, and he, in his turn, began to speak in a quick, low voice that gradually grew louder as he went on.

"I have been poor all my life," he began, "but for me poverty is nothing, for I can endure all things. God is with me night and day, and he whispers to me and makes the light burn in my soul.

"I was born in the mountains of Virginia. There were fourteen of us, and we lived in a two-room cabin.



We never felt cold in the winter time, but we were very often hungry.

"My father was very red in the face, and he sat in the corner day and night drinking white whiskey, that he had made, out of a bottle. Sometimes he offered us some, and we fought for the bottle between ourselves, for it made us forget that we were hungry. Then he would laugh and slap his knee with his hand.

"If mother was there she would fly at us and take it away, and then afterward would drink it herself, when we were in bed. I have often seen her lying on the floor of the cabin, her hair, all matted with dirt, streaming about her, her dress open at the throat, and the neck of the bottle still between her teeth as she slept there.

"When father found her that way he would beat her with a stick of wood, because she had let the fire go out. A drunken woman is a disgusting sight, but when she is your mother it is horrible. Then God came, or I should rather say the minister.

"He rode up from town, a matter of ten miles away, and dropped in to see us. That night father and mother were sober, and we all sat around listening to him talk.

"He told us about religion, and I listened to him so intently that I forgot to hold my rags about me, and the bottle of whiskey that I had stolen from father that day and hidden inside my coat fell on the floor and smashed.

"Then father reached for the whip that hung above the door, but the minister made him stop and got a promise from me there and then that I would never steal again. I broke that promise years later, but that remains still to be told.

"To cut a long story short, the minister took a liking to me, and later I went to live with him in town, where I earned my keep by waiting on his table and doing odd jobs about the house. My master was a real father to me, actually laying a small sum aside from his yearly pittance that he might send me to college when the time came.

"I entered a theological seminary at the age of sixteen, and here in due course I graduated with high honors. I had always intended going back to my old home in the mountains and helping those who stood so badly in need of help, so when I became qualified to teach the word of God, I left my foster father, the minister, and went back to the old life.

"It has always been a mystery to me why so many men and so much money have been wasted trying to teach the doctrines of religion to the savages on some tropical island. It's a good old proverb that says charity begins at home. Here, in our United States, are so many men and women in dire need of a crutch to lean on, a helping hand to guide them, a belief in a better land to come, that it seems to me a wicked thing, a senseless thing, to look past them to a foreign people and a foreign land.

"When I reached my old home the horror of that life was brought before me the more vividly, because of the years that I had lived under different conditions. When you yourself have changed for the better it is a shock to find that others have not.

"I found my father a red-eyed old drunkard of sixty, hugging the stove winter and summer alike, and talking to himself continually in a high treble voice. My mother had been dead for several years, and he was all alone in the house, except for my one homely

unmarried sister, who had stayed with him to take care of him in his old age. All the rest of his sons and daughters had gone out into the world to take their chance.

"I immediately started preaching in the little log church that had been vacated for many years, as the last minister had been unable to exist, on account of the poverty of the parish, and after that none of the others had wished to take it.

"I managed to hang on however, for I had two things in my favor, one was that I was unmarried and the other that I was a mountain man born, and could consequently manage on far less than my luxurious predecessors; but even I found it hard sometimes to keep on.

"It is a difficult thing for a man to thank God on his knees when his stomach is empty. He naturally asks himself the simple question, 'What have I got to thank him for?' and to this there is no answer. I worried over this constantly as the years went by.

"My congregation was so poor, so pitifully poor, and they wanted food to eat and clothes to wear, and all that I could give them was just religion, religion, religion. They were farmers with no proper tools for farming, and with the most stubborn soil that God ever made to battle with.

"One day it became plain to me that if these poor men had the proper implements for farming they could better their own condition a thousand fold. That night, at the age of fifty, I talked the whole thing over with my sister and concluded to start all over again.

"I decided to go to New York on the little money that I had scraped together all these years and see some

of the wealthy philanthropists that I had read about in the papers. I felt convinced that they would extend a helping hand immediately when they had heard my story.

"Two days later found me in the great city. I had made out a list of the prominent men that I wished to see, and I promptly called on each in turn.

"I was met with curt refusals everywhere. Either the great men were too busy to see me, or else they were interested in other charities, and wanted none of mine.

"Fresh from my last fruitless attempt, with a sad heart and a downcast head, I was walking back to the station, intending to catch the evening train, when I suddenly felt a light touch on my arm.

"I wheeled about and confronted a very ragged young man, who had one of the most sorrowful faces that I have ever seen. Although, as I have said, he was a mere boy, he had a look in his eyes as though all the suffering of the world had passed over his head.

"‘Come,’ he said very softly, and quite unconsciously I turned and followed him.

"Through the labyrinths of the city streets he led me with an assured step, stopping unchallenged now at one business house and now at another, and studying the policy of each, he showed me the underlying rottenness of the money kings, and pointed out that they were thieves, and the worst of all thieves, for they robbed the poor.

"‘Now I have shown you the city,’ he cried, ‘and there is no hope for you, no hope, unless——’

"‘Unless?’ I asked eagerly.

"‘Unless you become a thief yourself,’ he answered simply.

" 'A thief?' I cried aghast.

" 'Yes,' he said. 'If all these men, as I have proved to you, rob the poor for purely selfish reasons, surely you are justified in robbing the rich for unselfish reasons. Become a Robin Hood of modern days and give back to the poor man what is the poor man's. Then you will be indeed precious in the eyes of God.'

" 'You ask me to steal,' I cried, 'and I a minister of the Gospel?'

" 'Think of the poor little children,' he said, and suddenly my eyes filled with tears."

"And who was this young man?" asked the prosecuting attorney with an incredulous smile.

Then the minister straightened to his full height, and his face lit up on a sudden, till it was almost beautiful. "There he sits accusing me," he cried, and he pointed straight at Noman.

For a moment there was the silence of amazement, and then came a roar of laughter that echoed through the court room peal on peal, in spite of the efforts of the judge to bring the crowd to order. As soon as the prosecuting attorney could make himself heard he spoke in a clear high tone.

"Mr. Noman," said he, with a dry smile, "is neither very ragged in his dress nor yet again very sorrowful looking." At this the people in the back of the room began to laugh again. "I think, to put it mildly, that you've made a mistake," he finished very curtly.

"No," answered the clergyman slowly, with a perplexed look. "I am sure it is the same man, although his clothes and face have changed somewhat."

"Well," cried the attorney good naturedly, "we'll waive the point. Tell us the rest of the story."

"There's not much more to tell," continued the

clergyman. "I met my friend here," and he indicated the other prisoner with his hand. "He taught me how to become a successful gambler and to deal myself whatever cards I wanted out of the pack. I was naturally very quick with my fingers, and soon was even better than my teacher in our dishonest profession.

"We traveled from one end of the country to the other, gambling for the most part with college boys, the sons of wealthy men, and we had very few scruples, it must be owned, in taking their money. Every cent that I have made this way has gone back to my poor parishioners in the mountains, but little do they know how I make the money that puts food in their stomachs and clothes on their backs, and nightly I pray to God that they will never know.

"You may put me in jail, you may crucify me, like they did the apostles of old, but you cannot take my happiness from me, for that will live forever. I am the preserver of these people, of my own people, and what though I have soiled my hands with the gold of the rich, it was not for myself, but for others that I did it, so that they might be lifted out of an existence that was worse than death. I am happy in this," and the clergyman sat down.

"Did you ever see this man before the day of the robbery, Mr. Noman?" asked the prosecuting attorney.

"Never," answered Noman coldly, shaking his head.

"I thought as much," said the lawyer, and turning again to the clergyman, "You haven't told us the rest of the story yet," said he. "How did you come to break into the apartment?"

"Oh," said the minister wearily, "we became known on the trains. People avoided us as though we had

the plague, and in consequence money became very scarce. We were at our wits' end, when Ivan Ter-genoff came to my friend and proposed the burglary. I was against it from the first, but I went with him as a matter of course. You know the rest."

Then the prosecuting attorney rose to his feet and made a very brilliant speech indeed. He went on to say that in his opinion these men were dangerous criminals proved guilty on their own confession, etc., etc., and that the clergyman in his statement had been playing for the sympathy of the jurors, etc., etc., and that finally criminals were criminals, and the law was the law, etc., etc.

The outcome of the trial was that the two prisoners were led away with a sentence of five years' imprisonment resting on their bowed heads.

Thus were the laws of man avenged.

## CHAPTER XVIII

It is not my purpose to dwell upon the months that followed the trial, and I will touch on them only lightly.

Gradually as the time passed by, George began to lose his fear of the old butler, Tergenoff, and went about as he had used to do alone and without starting like a frightened rabbit at an unexpected touch on his arm or an unusual noise behind his back.

We still lived the life of young men about town, and Wilnot was more than ever subject to sudden pains about the heart. He was inclined now, in his rare hours of sobriety, to bemoan his past life, and to cry out against fate, that, he insisted, had made him what he was.

"It isn't fair," he would whine. "Here I am at the very prime of a man's life, when I should be enjoying every minute of it, and yet look at me, threatened by death at any moment, never knowing, when I close my eyes in sleep whether I will wake up in the flesh or not. It is terrible."

"But why don't you lead a better life?" I suggested. "The doctor says——"

"Oh, damn the doctor!" he burst out. "He don't know me at all. He thinks that I can turn over a new leaf as easily as he can put poison in a man's stomach. I'm not made that way, that's all, and I can't help it." and he would go on in this strain until Norman and I silenced him with an angry word or left him alone to talk to himself.



One day while passing the Gun and Rod Club I saw Wilkinson, leaning back in an easy chair, lolling in one of the windows. There was something strange and unnatural about the man that caught my eye on the instant.

As he sat there staring out he looked like a huge wax figure, an enormous doll propped up in the window, so white was his bloated face, and so expressionless were his dull eyes. What little animation and life he had once had seemed to have deserted him altogether, and left him, living and breathing it is true, but to all other purposes little better than dead.

I passed on with an involuntary shudder. Here is a man, I thought to myself, who is the personification of all my earthly ambitions, money, and then I asked myself for the first time, "Is this that you are doing then really worth while?" I could not answer this question, and it worried me.

That same night Noman dropped in to see us, and, after a lengthy discussion as to the best way of mixing a certain cocktail, the topic of conversation changed to the affairs of Mr. Wilkinson and Miss Courtney.

"I heard a strange rumor to-day," said Noman. "They say that Wilkinson and Edna have split up."

"What's that?" cried George, brightening visibly.

"It's gospel truth that they've had a quarrel," Noman went on, "and that isn't all of it by a long way," and he lowered his voice to a confidential whisper as he continued, "They say that Wilkinson is hitting the dope."

"The dope?" we cried together.

"Yes, cocaine," said Noman. "He uses it constantly, and has given up everything else for it, and so you see that leaves poor Edna out in the cold, while

all her theatrical ambitions go with her. If she doesn't find someone else soon she'll drift down with the tide," and he gave Wilmot a quick look. "I had an idea that you liked her, George?" said he.

"Like her?" cried George. "If I only could, but I haven't got the money, Dick. If I had I'd give her the best, the very best, but I haven't, and that's all there is to it."

"Oh, come now, we may find a way," cried Noman. "You know that I was always a good friend of yours, George. I might give you a little tip on the market that might help along. What do you say?"

"I thought that was done with. I promised——" began Wilmot, but at this Noman broke in.

"Oh, this is a sure thing," said he. "You can't lose," and then turning to me, "Do you mind running around the corner and buying me a box of cigarettes, Jim? George and I want to talk over some business."

When I returned they still had their heads together, but in a moment more George was out in the hall putting on his coat and talking in an excited voluble manner the while.

"And so she's around at Maxim's?" he cried.

"Yes," answered Noman, "and I told her to wait until I got back. She's awfully cut up, the poor girl, and is drinking one absinthe right after the other. She'll be mighty glad to see you, George."

"You don't mind, Jim," said Wilmot, turning to me, "if we leave you here to-night? We've got a very important engagement, very."

"Not at all," I answered, and in a moment more the door had closed behind them. They were gone.

Then began the last lap of Wilmot's race to the devil. For days he wouldn't put his foot in the apartment,

and when he did finally make his appearance I saw that death was creeping on him fast.

He had a nervous habit now of jerking his chin up unconsciously, and when he raised a glass to his lips his hand shook so that he invariably spilt half its contents. His eyes became so sunken in his head that when he looked at you they were lost in the black shadows about them, and when he walked his legs fairly bent under him from weakness. All and all, he was the most pitifully broken-down wreck of a man it has ever been my lot to behold. How he continued to live and be about on his feet as long as he did is a mystery to me even yet.

Every now and then when George was home Edna Courtney would drop in to pay us little informal calls, and very informal they usually proved to be. A certain air of girlishness that she had about her when I first met her in Maxim's had vanished now entirely along with her vivid coloring. She looked years older than her age, and when she laughed it was the forced tuneless laughter of a woman who has seen too much of life and found the taste of it bitter in her mouth.

We often had wine suppers in the apartment, and sometimes I would be an honored guest at these. Generally about two o'clock in the morning we would be in such a state of good fellowship that the neighbors would complain to our landlord on the morrow. One of these parties still sticks in my memory, and as it made such a lasting impression on me I will describe it here.

George had insisted on ordering a dozen quarts of champagne, and I recollect that toward the end of the evening he shampooed his hair with the contents of a whole bottle, laughing foolishly the while, and repeat-

ing over and over again between breaths, "The hell with expense, the hell with expense!"

A little later he became maudlin, and lay with his head on the table, sobbing out that nobody cared for him, and he wished that he was dead. Suddenly he straightened in his chair and looked at Edna Courtney with tear-dimmed eyes.

"You care for me, don't you, Edna?" he cried. "I buy you everything you want, so tell me you care for me."

"Yes, George," she answered quietly, with her eyes fixed on Noman's face, and never even glancing his way, "of course I do."

With that Wilmot leaned over the table littered with bottles and wet with wine, and pulled her toward him. He kissed her eyes, her hair, her cheeks, her lips, while she lay listless in his arms, submitting to his caresses with a kind of cold indifference, while she still looked past him with unseeing eyes.

Then with a hoarse cry, George seized a half-empty bottle, and putting the neck of it between his teeth drank it even to the last drop, and then reeled over on the table, unconscious, his hair all damp and dark in a pool of wine.

Still Edna Courtney's eyes never left Noman's face, and he looked back at her, smiling, over the prostrate body, over the wet wine-soaked table, over the broken glasses.

## CHAPTER XIX

Now I come to the last moments of that ill-spent life, and to the horror that rested on him at the very end. May such a life, and such an end of life, be the lot of very few on this earth, for I, that saw it all, know that it was terrible past all belief.

For a whole week George had been away from the apartment, and I had been left alone, writing day and night on the novel, that was soon to be a best seller. It had been a cold winter's day, and now that the night had set in a flurry of gleaming snow beat against the window panes and climbed higher and higher up the frosty glass, like a great white hand.

As I sat before the fire all at once I heard the lock of the outside door turn cautiously, and then I saw the giant figure of Noman looming in the hallway.

"Is George in?" he asked, in a strange unnatural tone, regarding me fixedly the while.

"No," I answered in astonishment. "Did you expect him to come home to-night?"

"I didn't know," he said a little vaguely; "but if he isn't here I'll be going," and he started to open the door again.

"But come in and warm yourself first. You're covered with snow."

"No," said he, "I can't. I've got an engagement," and then, without another word, he went out, closing the door softly behind him and leaving me staring after him in some astonishment.

"George must have given him a latchkey," I said to

myself, and then I gave the thing no further thought, but composed myself to put in a good night's writing.

It may have been an hour after this that I heard the door open again, and, on turning about suddenly, saw George slip in as noiselessly as a shadow and close it carefully behind him. Then he strode into the sitting-room, like Noman all white from snow, and sank into the Morris chair near me. I noticed that he was panting heavily as though he had just run a race, while, in spite of the cold outside, big drops of perspiration rolled down his forehead.

For a moment he sat all hunched up in his chair, with his eyes fixed on the glowing grate, and then suddenly he turned half about in his seat and looked at me with a quick uncertain glance.

"Jim," said he, "you're a good friend of mine, aren't you?"

"Yes, I suppose so," I answered, "but I don't get your meaning, George. What are you driving at?" and then as I looked at him in surprise I saw that his whole face was twitching strangely and that his eyes were filling up with tears.

"Jim," he continued in a hoarse voice, laying a shaking hand on my arm, "Jim, if that's true, why you're the only friend I've got. I'm up against it, old man."

"Up against it? What's the matter? Sick again?"

"No, no," he went on hurriedly, "it isn't that. I've got to leave the city, leave the city, you understand, to-night, now," and he started to rise to his feet.

"But hold on," I cried, thinking his mind had given way. "What's your hurry? It's a beastly night to travel in."

"Good God," he sobbed, "can't you see? I'll be put in jail if I don't, in jail, can't you understand?" and

he broke down completely, and cried hysterically, with his head held between his hands.

For a moment I was speechless from amazement, and then gathering my faculties together with a mighty effort I spoke as calmly as I could.

"What would they put you in jail for?"

For a moment the sobbing figure in the chair answered never a word, but finally he lifted his tear-stained face to mine and said quite simply, "For stealing, Jim, for stealing."

"Stealing?" I repeated dully. "What did you ever steal?"

"Money, fifty thousand dollars of it," he cried out angrily, as though I had offended him. "And now you want to know why, I suppose? Well, I'll tell you why. Because I wanted to live a little before I fed the worms, because I wanted to taste the joys of life before they were taken from me forever, because I was a fool maybe, but no matter, that's all over and done with now."

"But to steal?" I cried in astonishment.

"Yes, it's a sin, I know," continued George bitterly, "but it's a far worse sin to be found out in these truly Spartan days, and I have committed the last sin, and have been found out, or will be found out in a very few hours."

"Tell me about it," I said quietly.

"Well, for years past," George went on, "I have been taking small sums out of the bank and playing the game at Wall Street. Noman advised me how to gamble with the money, and consequently I always won, and was able to replace what I had taken before it had been missed.

"Why did I become a thief? Because I was brought

up to enjoy the life of a gentleman, that's the reason. When I came to the city and took a position in the bank at ten dollars a week I found that I couldn't live like a gentleman.

"I always liked to wear good clothes; I could no longer buy good clothes. I was fond of good things to eat, and they were now beyond my means. Everything pertaining to a cleanly wholesome life was severed from my existence, and how I longed for these things only I know.

"One day I looked about me, and saw laborers of the pick and shovel variety, men of no education, of no refinement, with no appearance of cleanliness to keep up, earning more money than I, with all my superior education, could get. The question then arose what do I gain by being a gentleman and striving to live up to the station in which I was born? The answer was so plain to see, so evidently the truth, that I gradually acted upon it, and slowly began to sink down to the level of these others. There at least I need not be a living lie.

"I was the middle-class youth between the grindstones of the two struggling giants, poverty and wealth. I must either be ground to a fine powder and blown away with the wind, or join one or the other, and I was about to choose the one in rags, when Noman came and whispered in my ear.

"He persuaded me that all men steal and that business itself was founded on theft. Then he showed me how I could take a little money from the bank and make far, far more.

"I fell in with his plan and did as he suggested many times, and always I was successful, and always Bill Hardy, who was rooming with me then, told me that



I would be found out some day, but I paid no attention to him and went on in my own way.

"Although I was entirely successful in my speculations, thanks to Noman, still, as you know, I was never really a happy man. Fear of detection went with me day and night, and to drown it I started drinking to excess. Soon my body began to fail me, and then my life was a hell indeed, a veritable hell.

"Many a time I've stood in my room with the cold barrel of a revolver pressed against my temples, while my nerveless finger tried to pull the trigger, but could not. I cling to life as though it were very dear to me, and yet in my heart I loathe myself, my very existence, still I am afraid to go out into the night alone."

He paused for a moment, and drawing out his pocket handkerchief started to wipe away the beads of perspiration that stood on his forehead.

"But how did they find you out?" I asked quickly.

"It was this way," continued George. "About two months ago I made a lot of money in a lucky deal in the Market, enough in fact to keep me going for a year or so, at my ordinary pace. I thought that this would last me until my death, and I promised myself there and then that I would never steal again.

"About this time Edna Courtney was left in the lurch by Wilkinson, and I decided to take his place. I hired an apartment for her, I bought her a small limousine, jewels, clothes, and everything that I could think of. Her slightest wish was my law, and when I came to look at my bank account it had dwindled down to almost nothing. The money that I thought would last me a year or so was gone in less than two months. Then Noman came, and, as usual, told me how I could make more.

"‘Don’t make it a piker’s pile this time,’ said he, ‘but have it last for a lifetime.’"

"I did as he said, and when I left the bank at noon I had fifty thousand dollars of somebody’s money in my pocket. I played the game on margins, and in two hours I had lost every cent of it. It was the first of Noman’s tips that had gone wrong."

"But didn’t you look him up?" I broke in. "He’s wealthy enough, by all reports, to have fixed you up without feeling it any."

"I’m coming to that," said George bitterly. "It was past seven o’clock before I could find him. He was sitting at a table in Maxim’s alone. He had his head bent over his plate, but when I spoke to him he looked up and his black eyes glistened coldly through his half-closed eyelids, like two pieces of agate."

"‘Well, what can I do for you?’ he asked in such a harsh, grating tone that I stepped back involuntarily, and had all I could do to answer him immediately."

"‘I lost that fifty thousand dollars that I took out of the bank,’ I whispered at length. ‘I want you to lend me the same amount so that I can put it back to-morrow.’"

"‘So you’re a thief, eh?’ he cried with a black look."

"‘Why, you’re joking, Dick,’ said I. ‘You told me to take it yourself.’"

"‘Just so,’ said he, and then half rising from his seat and looking me straight in the eyes the while, he went on in a cold, metallic tone: ‘You see that man over in the corner of the room, next to the window?’"

"‘Yes,’ I answered. ‘Why?’"

"‘Just this,’ said he, speaking very slowly and distinctly, ‘he’s a detective and a friend of mine,’ and

then raising his voice, 'If you're not out of here in five minutes' time why I'll give you up to him, that's what I'll do.'

"For a moment I thought that he was kidding me along, but when I looked into his cold eyes and impassive face I knew somehow that he was speaking the truth, and nothing but the truth, and I turned my back on him then and walked out into the blinding snow storm.

"That was two hours ago, and ever since I've been rambling about the city aimlessly, scarcely knowing or caring where I was going.

"I believe I'm losing my mind. Once I thought I saw a man following me, and I redoubled my pace, finally even breaking into a run. When I reached the apartment I looked behind me, and there was no one there, and yet I had heard footsteps pattering behind me all the way. I must be losing my mind."

"When will they find out about the money?" I broke in impatiently.

"To-morrow morning," he answered listlessly, "unless they've already found it out."

"Then you must be moving," I cried. "You can't stay here. The police are liable to come any minute."

"What's the use?" he whined fretfully. "When I first came up here I wanted to get away on the jump, but now I don't care anything about it," and he stretched out his hands toward the fire. "It's so comfortable here, and besides they won't find it out until morning. Let me warm myself before I go, Jim."

Just at this moment, as though to give the lie to his words, there came a loud ring on the door-bell, that

brought George to his feet on the instant, his face gone a deathly white.

"What shall I do, Jim?" he cried. "What shall I do?" and he began to wring his hands like a weak woman.

"Get in my room," I whispered, "and if the worst comes to the worst, why you can leave by the fire-escape."

He obeyed me to the letter in silence, except for a doubtful whispered, "Don't give me away, Jim," as the door shut behind him.

Then, with an assured mien, although with a wildly beating heart, I went into the hallway and threw open the outside door. My worst fears were realized. There, standing on the threshold, were two burly policemen, their helmets and brass buttons shining brightly in the electric light.

"Is Mr. Wilmot here, sir?" asked one of them, touching his helmet with a fat red hand.

"No," I answered in affected surprise, and then seeing the incredulity written on the men's faces, I added, "At least, not to my knowledge. I've been taking a nap before the fire, and just woke up as you rang the bell."

"He's here," said the policeman. "We know that much, for we spotted him from across the street, when he came in. He's wanted by Headquarters, sir."

"Come in," I said, "and look the place over if you want to. I've got no wish to oppose the law."

They both grinned at this and stepped in readily enough, while I ushered them into the sitting-room.

They searched the room thoroughly, peering behind curtains, looking under the lounge, and even casting suspicious looks at the large open fireplace, where the

coals still glowed, as though the missing man might have wedged himself up the chimney, preferring to be roasted to death rather than to be seized by the law.

"He's not here," said one of them at last. "Where's his bedroom, sir?"

I told him truthfully enough that it was the second room down the hallway, and he lumbered off to search it, while the other stationed himself at the front door to make sure that Wilmot should not make his escape that way.

This left me unguarded, and so I immediately tiptoed to the door of my own bedroom, intending to open it a crack and see if George had made the best of his opportunity to leave by the fire-escape. I even had my hand on the knob and was turning it slowly little by little when suddenly there came a hoarse scream to my ears, a scream that rose and fell, throbbing in every note such abandoned horror, such a terrible agony of despair, that I felt the sweat standing out on my forehead, and the blood turning to ice in my veins.

How long the screaming endured I do not know, but this I know, that quite suddenly it stopped in the very middle of a note, as though a hand had been placed over the victim's mouth, and, as I strained my ears to listen I heard a heavy thud as of a body falling, followed by a more terrible silence.

By a great effort of will I pushed open the door and stood on the threshold looking in. Strange as it may seem, my eyes turned immediately to the window, passing over the prostrate body of George, that lay all doubled up on the rug, and fixing themselves on the white face that peered in through the frosted glass like some wicked demon of the night.

The face, with the lips drawn back from the teeth in a frightful grimace, and the eyes extended and bloodshot, was the face of Tergenoff, but the expression of it, as I saw it then, was hardly human in its malignant look of gratified hate and revenge. It was not a face, but a mask of horror.

As I continued to gaze at it stupidly, I saw that the eyes, with a kind of red fire glowing in their depths, stared straight at the dead body on the floor, with a gloating, greedy look, while the thin tip of the man's scarlet tongue curled up over his pointed teeth.

For a moment the head remained framed in the window, a ghastly, grisly thing, that came to haunt my pillow on many a sleepless night after, and then quite suddenly it vanished, leaving but the plain black background of the night.

Up to this I had been struck motionless from horror, but now that it had gone I ran to the window, and, throwing it open wide, looked out. Far below me was a tiny black figure that scrambled down the fire-escape with the startling agility of a monkey. Finally it vanished in the shadows at the bottom, and then reappeared again on the top of the fence in the yard, as he leaped over it. Then he was gone for good.

I turned back to the tragedy in the room. The two policemen by now were bending over the prostrate body.

"There's no life here," said one with his hand resting on George's breast.

"As dead as mud," said the other. "Look at the glassy eyes on him. He's seen the devil this night."

"He's been murdered!" I cried, but at that the two policemen shook their heads.

"There's not a mark on him," said the first.

"But," I said, "there was a man on the fire-escape. I just saw him climbing down with my own eyes."

At this they joined me at the window, and I pointed out the marks where the snow had been rubbed off the iron ladder outside, and then I told them the whole story of Tergenoff, and how I had seen him through the window just now, while all the time George lay dead there on the floor, with a certain ghastly grimace on his drawn face, as though he were listening too, listening silently, and finding the tale that I was telling amusing, vastly amusing.

"He's dead from the fright of it," said one of the policemen, when I had finally done. "We were in front of him, and the devil in back."

Indeed, the fellow's theory proved correct enough, for the coroner diagnosed the case as a death from heart-failure brought on by a sudden great shock.

Thus did George Wilmot meet his end, "between the devil and the deep sea."

## CHAPTER XX

After Wilmot's death I was left all alone in the apartment. I had formed no close friendships in the city with perhaps the exception of Noman, and now he never visited me. In fact, after hearing George's story I was very glad to be rid of him, for it seemed to me that a man who could prove so false a friend to one was not a man to be cultivated by another.

A few months after the tragedy my first novel appeared in print, and in a short time became very popular. Its love theme appealed to the reading masses, and in consequence they bought it by the thousands. When I read it over, in book form, I was greatly disappointed. I owned to myself that it was merely an ordinary story, told in an ordinary way, a surface fiction formed to please alone, and having nothing in its makeup beyond the merest commonplaces of narration.

As the months and finally the years passed by I became discontented with myself, and irritable at all times, chafing under the ropes of conventionality with which I had tied myself down, and wishing heartily to tear them off, and yet lacking the courage to do so.

"I will write the great American Novel," I said to myself, and yet two years had passed by and I had put it off from day to day. To add to my discontent my health had begun to fail me, and I soon became a victim to insomnia, tossing restlessly on my hot pillow, night after night, with staring, sleepless eyes.

One night, after lying awake for many hours, I



jumped out of bed with a curse and hurriedly putting on my clothes went out into the sleeping city, intending to walk myself into a state of absolute fatigue.

For many hours I tramped through the streets, and still felt wide awake and restless. At last I entered Central Park and sank down on a nearby bench, tired by my unusual exercise and yet throbbing all over in a high nervous tension.

How long I sat there alone I do not know, but at last two indistinct human figures loomed out of the gloom, and, approaching nearer and nearer, finally sat down on the very bench that I occupied.

The one nearest to me sat bolt upright, while the other sank back, with his hat tilted over his eyes, and seemed to fall asleep on the instant.

I naturally took these two men to be homeless wanderers, the driftwood of a great city, without lodging and probably with empty stomachs as well, and, as I leaned back comfortably in my seat, feeling the soft warm folds of my fur coat about me, I began to soliloquize, with grateful content, on the vast difference between these ragged vagabonds and myself, the successful young author.

Suddenly my pleasing reveries were interrupted. The man who sat beside me spoke in a hoarse, strange voice that ended in a fit of hard, dry coughing very pitiful to hear.

"Will you give me a light?" said he.

"Certainly," I answered, and fumbling in my pocket I brought out a match, and, lighting it, held it to the tip of the cigarette that I saw projecting from the shadowy face.

At the next moment it had fallen out of my fingers to the pavement, at the sudden start I made, for the

face I saw by the light of it was none other than the face that I had once seen in the office of the "Everybody's Friend," the face of the wild ragged poet.

It had changed terribly in these years that had passed, till now it was stamped with the imprint of a thousand sufferings, of a thousand disappointments, but the sunken tragic eyes still glowed with the old spirit, like liquid shining pools of light flashing out from deep hollow caverns.

I lit another match with a steadier hand, and noticed that the man, although it was a cold night in early spring, was clad from head to foot in rags, that rustled as the wind blew through them, like the torn dry leaves of autumn.

"And so you have come to this?" I said aloud, half unconsciously.

"Yes," he answered in his hoarse voice, "And you?"

"I am a success," I cried almost boisterously. "The world takes kindly to my work. I please the people."

"But do you please yourself?" he asked quite simply, and then continued, not waiting for an answer, "I read your book, and I pity you from my soul."

"You pity me," I laughed, "and you in rags?"

"Just so, in rags," said he, "and yet I have something here that you would give the world to have."

"And what is that?"

"A friend," he answered quietly, "and such a friend. See," and he touched the man beside him on the arm.

Just at this moment the full moon, that had been smothered in a mass of black clouds, broke through on a sudden and lit up the white path, the brown iron bench, the two dark figures, in a kind of dead sunlight. At that the second man moved uneasily, and the hat that had shadowed his eyes rolled off, leaving

him bare-headed beneath the stars. Then it was that I experienced my second great surprise, for the face that I saw over the poet's shoulder was the white, tranquil face of none other than Bill Hardy himself.

"Hardy," I cried at last, "what are you doing here?"

"I am with my friend," said he.

"This poor failure can't be your friend," I broke in. "Come back with me. I have need of you. I am the successful man."

"No," he answered in strange excitement, "you are not the successful man, for here is the successful man," and he laid his hand on the poet's shoulder. "The successful man is the man who succeeds in living up to his ideals, to his talents, without hesitating as to the cost. This man has done that. Have you? He has sacrificed himself on the altar of genius, and has created the indestructible. Have you? He has taken the fire of creation to his breast, and it has warmed him to the bitter end. Have you? Pain, suffering and self-denial have been his lot, and he has been through them all, going on and on, with never a backward look at the golden calf. Have you?"

"No, you have done none of these things, and yet you call yourself the successful man, you the pitiful failure, you the weak mortal who has lowered himself in the dust, you the living lie; but listen and you will hear the truly successful man, the all-powerful man, and then drink your cup of bitterness to the dregs, the bitterness of what might have been."

No sooner had he ceased to speak than the wild poet beside him burst out into a kind of chant. His voice lost all of its hoarseness on the instant, as though by magic and became sonorous and soft by turns, rising

suddenly to the fierceness of battle, and then sinking again to a dirge for the dead.

It was a beautiful thing to listen to and an awe-inspiring thing to hear, there in the light of the dying moon, and as I silently sat, entranced and aghast, and yet throbbing all over to the wild musical swing of it, I knew that this was poetry such as I had never dreamed of in my wildest moments, this was poetry that would live forever.

The great soaring soul of the man rang out in it, beating time, you might say, with the madly dancing music of the spheres, now dominant and powerful, now sinking, sinking, sinking with despair, and yet all unconquerable to the last. It was not a poem of the century, it was a poem that would last for all ages, a monument of fire.

When his voice had finally died away on the silence of the night I was left speechless from amazement, and yet tingling all over with a strange delight that brought the tears to my eyes and the hot blood to my cheeks. For the first time I saw myself in my true colors, stripped bare by naked truth, and the sight appalled me for an instant, and then in that very instant I remolded myself and started over again. I had been blind, but now, at last, I could see.

"And you did this?" I cried at last. "You?"

"Yes," he answered, and his chin sank down until it rested on his breast.

"Then, oh, master," I cried, quite beside myself, "you, who wear these rags, are indeed the successful man. I see the truth, the pitiful truth, for the first time. I am indeed the sordid living lie, the masquerader, the weak fool, and these, all these, are yours,

not mine, you understand are yours, all yours. Take them then, and let me make amends, my master."

So saying, with twitching fingers, I tore off my fur coat and threw it in a bundle at his feet, I drew out a wad of bills and scattered them on the bench beside him, and then I turned and looked at Hardy's face. It was transfigured at that moment by a great joy, while a bright living light shone out of his eyes into mine.

As I turned and left them there I felt that at last I had a friend. Once I looked back and saw them still sitting silently as before, regardless of the money that rustled between them, and of the coat that still lay at their feet.

## CHAPTER XXI

As I entered the nearest subway station I seemed to be walking on air. I could still hear, repeated over and over again in my ears, the lines of that wonderful poem, and the beautiful voice of the poet as he laid bare his soul before me.

"I see the truth," I said to myself, "and now, on this very night, I will go home and start out afresh." Little did I think how impossible this proved to be.

At Sixtieth Street as I sat staring straight before me two passengers entered the car, and drew my attention on the instant—a man and a woman, both evidently intoxicated, they fell into their seats heavily and looked about them with dull filmy eyes.

I didn't recognize, at the first glance, that the sodden female creature, who sat opposite me, was once the pretty and stylish Edna Courtney, such a change had the last few years made in her appearance. She was fat and slovenly looking now, while the skin of her face was red in spots like an underdone beefsteak. Even her eyes had lost their old-time beauty, and seemed smaller, while the little wrinkles under them, that had once added to her charms, were now great black pouches, that hung down a little, disclosing the purple flesh under the eyelids.

Her companion was evidently a Jew of the lower classes, a cheap, flashily dressed man of perhaps thirty-five, with a certain air of dirt and grease about him. He had fallen fast asleep as I watched him, and he was snoring sonorously with his head on his com-

panion's shoulder, and with one red, dirty hand clasp-  
ing her arm. Although, as I have said, he was asleep,  
he still held an unlighted cigar stump between his dis-  
colored teeth, while a tiny stream of saliva ran from  
the corner of his mouth to his chin, and then dripped  
down his striped waistcoat, drop by drop.

All at once I felt that Edna Courtney was looking  
at me. For a moment I evaded her eyes, with a feel-  
ing of false shame at my heart that I should ever have  
known such a woman. Suddenly it occurred to me  
that if Bill Hardy were in my place he wouldn't act  
like this, no, he would recognize her, if she had sunk  
into the very filth of the street. Here was my first  
opportunity to prove myself a changed man.

With a great effort of will I looked her straight in  
the eyes, which were for the moment hard and bright  
as flint, and then I raised my hat and smiled. As I  
did so her eyes softened visibly and a great wave of  
hot blood flooded her cheeks, while she looked about  
her with frightened little glances, and then nodded  
quickly and turned her head away.

For the rest of the journey, until I got out at my  
station, she gazed straight before her, while the  
drunken man still snored on her shoulder, but the look  
of tragedy in those eyes, the horror depicted on that  
white face, were written there for the world to see.

When I finally reached the apartment, I deposited  
with great care the new novel that I had been work-  
ing on into the glowing grate, and then I got out  
paper and pencil, and sat before the fire waiting for the  
inspiration to take hold of me, but alas it never came.

Somehow the thoughts that had formerly flocked  
to my brain when I was a boy at college had now de-  
serted me. As Hardy had said, I had sold the gifts

that the gods had given me for gold, and the gods were jealous gods.

When I went to bed at last, just as the newly risen sun was peering at me over the ragged roof-tops, I had written scarcely a dozen words. I was a writer who had forgotten how to write.

In the months that followed I tried to regain my lost art, but it was in vain, the power of expression had gone from me forever. I was a heap of cold ashes, and the fire of creation had died in my brain. Gradually, however, I became reconciled to this, and I think succeeded in doing a little good in a small way.

From the first I had always had a comfortable income, and now, thanks to the immense sale of my book, I was even a wealthy man. Remembering my experience with the genius in rags, I visited the park frequently, hoping some day to see him again. Although I was disappointed in this, still I was able to help a few really destitute men, and make them fit for better things.

One day I came upon a small notice in a newspaper, with this head line, "Poet Dies in Garret." Naturally the thing interested me, and so I read it very carefully. It seemed that the man had practically starved to death. The article described vividly the horrors of the bare attic where the dead body had been found, and went on to say that a sheet of paper covered with closely written lines of poetry lay in his dead hand pressed against his breast.

I was so impressed with the thing that I went down to the morgue to see the corpse. What was my surprise, my horror, when I saw lying on the cold marble slab the tall, emaciated figure of Hardy's friend, the master poet.



The strong face was now composed in peaceful sleep and that fiery spirit had at last consumed the body and flown upward. Death had been kinder to him than life had ever been, for it left him with a smile on his lips.

Of course I immediately took the funeral expenses on my own shoulders, and stood alone, with Hardy, at the grave of this gifted genius. If the world had only known who was buried on that day they would have flocked there by the thousands, but they did not know until later.

Next I put forth all my efforts to find the manuscript, that had disappeared somehow, shrewdly suspecting that it was the very poem I heard that never forgotten night in Central Park. I discovered it at last reposing peacefully in a police station, where, in all likelihood, it would have remained to the last, unhonored and unsung. I immediately placed it in the hands of the critics, and they, now that the author was dead, took it to their bosoms and conceded it the highest place in modern poetry.

All men know the poet and the poem now, and they praise his name, so that the echoes of it will ring through the centuries to come. Thus did the ill-fated Ludgrieve fulfil his prophecy, and rise again from the dead, to sit with the immortals on the sunlit heights.

## CHAPTER XXII

Now I come to the last of my tale, when I saw Norman and Hardy face to face, and judged between them. May I be able to set before you, my readers, the happenings of that eventful night, so that you may see them even as I saw them.

It was a full year after the poet's death, and a windy cold night in early March, when I was returning to the apartment after one of my usual midnight walks.

Several inches of snow had fallen that evening, and as I walked along the white streets I felt somehow that the whole town had vanished like a nightmare, leaving me alone in a land of fancy. The commonest objects had lost their individual meanings under the frosty covering, and were gradually weaving themselves into my dreams.

The streets were no longer streets, but long white trails overhung by frowning snow-capped boulders. Men and women were no longer human beings, but grim silent specters that stole past noiselessly, and vanished in the gloom. It was as though the graves were giving up their dead.

"Surely," I said to myself, "this is no city, but a giant spider web of interlacing streets, a wicked maze, where all paths lead no where, and where the only hope is death. These other shapes know nothing of this, but plod on and on, with hope burning brightly in their breasts and their eyes fixed on the morrow, pushing on over the dead decomposing bodies of the

fallen with never a pitying glance, until they, in their turn, are trampled underfoot, and hear the awful voice of time gathering his sheep, 'Fools, fools, fools, the hour striketh!'

Suddenly I came to myself with a start and looked about me. Unconsciously I had wandered off the great thoroughfare, and now was in one of the poorer sections of the city. The narrow deserted street where I stood, with its low squat two-story tenements, was entirely unfamiliar to me, and for a moment I was puzzled as to which way to turn.

Finally I decided to push on, and had hardly advanced a dozen steps before I saw two dark indistinct figures slip out of an alleyway and precede me down the street. I could make out nothing about those in front of me except that they were a man and a woman, and that even in the gloom they had a peculiarly familiar appearance.

As we walked up the street it grew lighter, and I could soon make out that the man was very tall and broad, and muffled up to the ears in a long fur overcoat. Strange to see in that neighborhood, he wore a tall silk hat, and swung a cane with a certain nonchalant air, like a man about town. The woman, on the other hand, was fat and slovenly dressed, while she walked carelessly, dragging her skirt after her through the soft snow and muddy puddles with a slight swishing sound.

At the corner of the street they passed directly under a lamp post, and the light streaming down on them revealed their identity. I could have sworn to Norman's broad shoulders in a thousand, and the woman, glancing back with a nervous look, I recognized as Edna Courtney.

"This is strange," I said to myself. "What can he want with this fallen desolate woman, when he could have so many others?" and then acting on a sudden impulse, I followed them as they turned down another street, narrower and more poverty-stricken than even the last.

On the corner was a tiny saloon, with a widely opened door that cast a long golden band of light on the white snow. Song and laughter echoed within, and, as I passed, I saw two black figures stagger out, and, turning about, stare after us.

Suddenly, as we turned down yet another street, I felt a breath of fresh and salty air on my cheek, and in a moment more we were standing on one of the wharves of the city with the river winding in front of us between its white banks, the color of lead, while it sobbed beneath us with almost a human tone.

Here the man and woman turned and faced each other. I had concealed myself behind a pile of wood barely five feet away, and I could hear every word they said and see every motion they made. The memory of that scene will be with me to my dying day.

The gray of morning was stealing over the city, and the face of Edna Courtney was white in it, ghastly white. Over the river misty shapes hovered like phantoms of the deep, and once to my ears there came the long-drawn wail of a fog horn far out to sea.

"So," said the woman hoarsely, "you have stayed to the last."

"I promised to do that," said Noman, with something like a laugh rasping in his throat.

"Yes," cried the woman wildly, "you promised that,

You have promised me everything, from the beginning to the end, and you have lied in everything but this.

"You promised me fame and wealth, and you gave me a taste of each, only to take them away again. In return I gave you my body, my soul, which I couldn't take back. Always I have been blinded by your face, your beautiful face, and it was a happiness to have you smile on me and feel your caressing hand. You taught me my lessons, and I listened like a little child at your knee. 'You shall love nothing,' you told me, 'except what I shall give you to love,' and you never gave me anything to love.

"As time went on I saw the gilded toy that you had dangled before my eyes, and which I had longed for with all my heart, gradually receding from me. You were drawing it away from me all the time, and yet you kept saying, 'I will give it to you. Have a little patience and I will give it to you. I promise that I will give it to you; only do this, and this, and I will surely give it to you.'

"You seemed so good, so kind, that at first I believed you implicitly, but the time went on and I sank lower and lower in the mire, and yet the struggling hope still lived on."

"And is it not there yet?" asked Noman. "You'd be far happier if it were."

"No," she cried breathlessly, "it's all gone now. It's swallowed up in something else, something far greater, love, truth, whatever it is, is budding in my heart, and everything is so fragrant, so beautiful, for spring is coming, and God is smiling on the earth, and even on me."

"On you?" said Noman.

"Yes, even on me," she cried, "on me, the trampled

flower in the mire, and he will raise me up and place me in his bosom, beside his great beating heart, for he made the flowers, and he suffers with the flowers."

The heavens were brightening fast in the east and the stars were going out one by one, while behind us lay the great building stretching up into the misty sky. Suddenly I saw two dark shapes glide past me, but as I looked again they were gone in the semi-gloom.

"And you would leave me now," cried Noman. "Why?"

"Because I have forgotten your face. I saw another face to-night, and it was a beautiful face. In his eyes were mirrored all that I had lost, purity, beauty and strength, and then it was that the love began to bud in my heart, and I sought to embrace him in my arms, but death was written in his eyes, and he glided on before me.

"It is strange, I thought that death was horrible, but now I know it's not, in fact it's beautiful, very beautiful, and so I followed the light of his eyes, the light of death, and it is shining on the water now before me. How beautiful it is, my God, how beautiful! I cannot hear your voice nor see your face, for I hear the sobbing of the waves and see the light of death shining on the water."

For a moment she stood there as silent as a statue, with a great light of happiness on her pale face, and then she threw up both hands above her head.

"I see the truth," she cried in a clear voice; "I see the truth," and then, before I could move hand or foot, she ran forward a few steps and jumped into the gray moaning water.

Throwing off my coat I rushed over to the side of

the wharf, but Noman was there before me and seized me by the arm.

"Don't be a fool," he shouted, "don't be a fool. You know what she is."

As we struggled there together a new figure appeared upon the scene, an heroic figure with long gray hair and flashing eyes, a figure standing on a great pile of wood above our heads, outlined against the sky.

For a moment the Merry Old Gentleman, for I had recognized him on the instant, stood there with his hands raised above his head, and then he dived straight down into the gray depths beneath, a shadow descending into the shadows.

For a moment the two heads appeared together, bobbing up and down like pieces of driftwood in the tide, and then they vanished slowly, silently, forever, while the light of a new day was breaking through the sky.

Thus did the Merry Old Gentleman fulfil his ambition and die well.

## CHAPTER XXIII

At last I broke away from Noman's grasp. "Good God, man," I cried, "how could you let them drown like that? Neither one could swim."

"Yes," said a sad voice behind me, "how could you do it?"

I wheeled about and came face to face with my old friend, the minister. The tears were streaming down his cheeks and his whole frail figure was shaking with convulsive sobs.

"You make too much of the affair," cried Noman. "Surely the lives of thieves and women of the street are of little value to the world and the city."

"I am a thief," cried the minister at that, with a deep red spot in either cheek. "I was a thief when I went to prison, and I've been a thief ever since. To-night we followed this young man, my poor friend and I, to rob him."

"Ah," broke in Noman, "but you steal for other people, you give what you take to the poor, you——"

But just at this moment another figure stepped out into the light and confronted Noman eye to eye.

"Bill Hardy," I cried. "Thank God, it's Bill Hardy!"

"Yes," echoed the minister, "thank God it is Bill Hardy," and we both stepped back and left the two strange men still facing each other in silence.

Then Hardy spoke at last in his deep, solemn voice. "Noman, Noman," said he, "we have met again, you and I, and it seems that we must struggle forever, you,



'The Spirit of Town,' of civilization, and I, 'The Spirit of Truth,' of Nature. Through all the ages we have met thus, and you have gone down before me to death. Are you now armed for another battle?"

"I am armed," cried Noman in a great voice, and he drew himself up to his full height, while the blood flooded his cheeks in a scarlet wave. "See," he continued, pointing with his long arm, "there is my city, and I have a great multitude of cities stretching away to the end of the earth. The whole world pays me homage, and I am firmly seated on my throne at last, while a horde of slaves bask in my smiles and pay me reverence, while still others work for me day and night, giving up the privilege of youth and strength to serve me. I give them toys to play with sometimes, and tell them that they are free and happy, and yet all the while I bind them closer to me, closer with a golden chain. Your day is over, Truth, your sun has set."

"So you have said before," answered Hardy quietly, "in Egypt, in Greece, in Rome, and yet I overthrew you, when the time came, and cast you out. Why not again, Oh Civilization?"

"Those were your days," cried Noman, "the days of truth, when art and war went hand in hand, but now the primitive in man has died out, and naught remains but weakening peace."

"If that day has come," said Hardy, "beware the barbarians. They will fall upon you and destroy you, root and branch. When the fighting spirit of man dies out there will be no man, but that time has not come yet. You command the people's minds, but I command their hearts. You command their superficial manners, but I control their souls. The race of man is born

in my name, and sinks to rest with a vision of me in their eyes, and you, so changeable in appearance, so weak in purpose, so false at heart, are but the ruler till I care to mount the throne."

"Never," cried Noman, "never. You have no weapon to use against me. You go about unarmed."

At this Hardy wheeled about on a sudden, and, going back into the shadows, reappeared once more, dragging the small, thin body of the murderer Ter-genoff behind him, as though he had been a little child.

"Here," he cried, "is my weapon," and he held the little Russian out at arm's length. "See how you have sharpened my weapon for me, Noman," he continued in a strange voice. "This is the maggot that is bred from the filth of your civilization. He hates the world, he hates himself, but far more than all, he hates you. Even now he'd like to have his teeth in your throat. To rend, blot out, scatter to the four winds, is his creed, and he'll live up to it, never fear. He is the barbarian of modern days that will lay low the walls of your city, he is a leech that would suck out the poison blood from a nation. Look at him even now."

Even as we looked at the little murderer his lips drew back from his pointed teeth in a horrible grimace, while his filmy eyes were fixed on Noman with a greedy look.

Then a strange thing happened, for suddenly Noman turned ghastly white, and his whole giant frame began to shake convulsively, then wheeling about abruptly, without another word, in perfect silence he strode up the wharf with quick, long strides, and finally vanished in the shadows of the great city.

For a long time after he had left us we stood staring after him. At last, when he had disappeared, the minister spoke in a clear, high voice.

"I see the truth," he cried, "I see the truth."

"Yes?" said Hardy softly.

"Yes," cried the clergyman, "at last I see it all. I was wrong, I was wicked, for I battled against evil with evil, and therefore I could not conquer. I took up the arms of the enemy to do battle against the enemy, and thus I was beaten by the enemy. I have sinned deeply," and he hung his head.

Again there was silence, a restful, peaceful silence, until the minister raised his calm eyes to the sky.

"See," he said in a low voice, "the sun is rising on a new day."

"Look, look," cried the little anarchist, pointing up at the crimson sky with a shaking finger. "It is rising in a sea of blood."

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